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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**



**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 11 April 2016

Lundi 11 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 11 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 11 avril 2016

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have Grenadian heritage. Joining us here today is the consul general and the ambassador for the Grenadian diaspora, Mr. Derrick James, and Geraldine Stafford. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome a group of representatives joining us today from Parkinson Canada, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of Canadians living with Parkinson's. They're here today to meet with policy-makers and to celebrate World Parkinson's Day. Please join me in welcoming them.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to welcome several people from my riding of Barrie to the Legislative Assembly today. First I'd like to welcome Alicia Eliot and Margaret-Anne Gillis and their grade 10 careers and civics classes from Barrie Central Collegiate Institute.

I would also like to welcome John Adamich, a student from the University of Toronto's faculty of medicine.

Mr. Todd Smith: This is Prince Edward-Hastings day here at Queen's Park. We do have a reception planned from 5 until 7 this afternoon, so after the festivities we welcome you to committee rooms 228 and 230 to see some of the great things that are produced and manufactured in Prince Edward-Hastings.

I do have a number of guests here from the Belleville and District Chamber of Commerce that I'd like to introduce this morning, in no particular order: Derrick Morgan; Peter Kempenaar; Rosi Ouellette; Suzanne Hunt; Tim Farrell, who's the president of the chamber; Luc Fournier; Susan Walsh; Racheal Sudds; Mike Hewitt; and Bill Saunders, who's the CEO of the chamber of commerce. We welcome them to question period this morning.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: On behalf of MPP Brad Duguid, I would like to welcome the parents of Diluk Ramachandra, the page captain today; his mother, Ruwani Ramachandra; and his father, Mr. Ramachandra, who are going to be here today to see their son in action.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of all members, I would like—although he has not yet arrived to join us, to be embarrassed—to congratulate the Minister of Aboriginal

Affairs on the indeterminate anniversary of his 39th birthday, which occurred while we were away.

Mr. Grant Crack: It gives me a great pleasure to wish a happy birthday to my executive assistant, Mr. Andrew Logan, who has been doing a wonderful job for us. On behalf of Andrea as well, she would like to say happy birthday.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Good morning. I just wanted to introduce today, in the galleries, the mother and father of our page Jack Beverly, from the great riding of Scarborough Southwest. I think the mother, Karen Beverly, and the father, Rob Beverly, are in the gallery today. I just wanted to welcome them to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today Haris Vaid, from the Ontario medical students.

Mr. Todd Smith: I neglected to introduce a very, very important person from Prince Edward-Hastings who's here today. Sandie Sidsworth, from the Canadian Mental Health Association office in our region, is here. It's great to welcome Sandie.

Also, he can't make it down right now. He's broadcasting from the Legislature today. Lorne Brooker will be joining us for question period from the Lorne Brooker Show on 800 CJBQ.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You've kind of got that radio announcer style down pat.

The member from Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted that Runnymede Collegiate Institute is in the House today, watching question period. Be good.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I agree.

The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: We have some special guests in the members' east gallery that I would like all members to welcome. We have Krystina Waler, who's a leader in the Ukrainian-Canadian community and with the Canada Ukraine Foundation.

We have Alla Nyzhnykovska and her son, Mykola. Mykola is a victim of the war in eastern Ukraine. He and his brother were playing in eastern Ukraine when they discovered a hand grenade that had not gone off. It did explode, and he lost both legs and a hand. He has since been receiving treatment from Canadian doctors in Ukraine and here in Canada. That's thanks to the Canada Ukraine Foundation and the generous financial support of the Ukrainian-Canadian community.

Remarks in Ukrainian.

Please join me in welcoming Mykola to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Mr. Speaker, the Liberals just won't stop. The Premier claimed that she's interested in cleaning up the fundraising mess she created. Yet last week we learned that Apotex used a by-election loophole to donate nearly \$10,000 to the Liberals, and what does the Premier do? She pops by for a visit at Apotex.

I wouldn't be alarmed by a few small donations, but this is the same company that donated nearly \$200,000 to the Liberal Party. Can the Premier guarantee this House that by taking Apotex's money, it has never affected a government policy decision?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am very much looking forward to a constructive meeting with the leaders of the opposition this afternoon. I'm not going to presuppose what will take place at that meeting, but this whole discussion about the fundraising rules is one that we need to have. I said last June that it's something that needed to happen. I look forward to building on changes that we have already made, and I look forward to input from the leaders of the opposition on legislation that we will bring forward in the spring.

I think there's a broad consensus that we need to make a transition away from corporate and union donations. I look forward to the input from the leaders of the opposition on what that transition might look like.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier—and my question on Apotex has not been answered. It's one thing to receive a small donation, but the Liberals received nearly \$200,000 from this one company. What does this get this company? How about \$650,000 a year in drug purchases from the Ministry of Health?

1040

Does this not merit a public inquiry? I don't understand why the government is running from a public inquiry if they have nothing to hide.

I'll ask again. To the Premier: Has this almost \$200,000 that the Liberal Party has taken affected a government policy decision related to Apotex? Please answer the question: yes or no?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, it has not. In fact, political donations do not buy policy decisions in my government. The innuendo that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. The member from Haldimand-Norfolk will withdraw.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Any innuendo or suggestion to the opposite is false. That is the fact.

I've always been very clear that the decisions we make in my caucus and in my cabinet are made based on evidence. They're based on the best interests of the people of Ontario, to the best of our ability.

I would say to the member opposite that again, I'm looking forward to our discussion this afternoon. I look forward to their input.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: If this is all smoke and it's not fire, then the Premier would embrace a public inquiry.

There are plenty of drug companies that receive money from the Liberal government, so what else may Apotex benefit from? In 2011, the government, led by then-Health Minister Matthews, appealed a court ruling that would allow pharmacies to have their own private labels. This would have allowed pharmacies to sell their own drugs for the same price, but not the drugs mandated by the province, like Apotex's.

At the time, the Globe and Mail called the decision to appeal the ruling "a minor mystery." They went on to suggest that perhaps the Liberals were "looking out for ... Apotex, the largest domestic manufacturer."

Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: Can the Premier assure us that these donations are not affecting the government's decisions? Will she embrace a public inquiry to show she has confidence in the manner in which they have led this government—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy government House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's interesting to see the newfound interest that the member apparently has in fundraising, because I have here a list of his donations during the leadership campaign. They're absolutely astounding. He broke an all-time record.

He said, first of all, that as soon as he got here, he was interested in fundraising—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Order. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, it's now the second time.

I'm going to ask the member to leave his list on his desk.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'll read it from here, Mr. Speaker.

An all-time record in fundraising for a leadership candidate was what was achieved by the leader of the official opposition, who said, when he got here, that he was astounded by the fundraising rules. Yet he took

advantage of those fundraising rules to raise well over \$1.6 million for his leadership campaign—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Time is up.

New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. While this government has been busy attending secret \$6,000 fundraising dinners, I've been touring hospitals and meeting with front-line workers across this province. Just this past weekend, I was in Windsor. I was told first-hand—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I expect some civility here, and I'll get it one way or another.

Finish, please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I was told first-hand the impact of this government's mismanagement on health care in Windsor: 120 nurses are gone because of this government, and \$20 million cut to Windsor Regional because of this government. The budget promised one thing, but what we're seeing in reality is very, very different.

I can tell you: I didn't charge a single red cent to meet with nurses in Windsor. I wanted to hear their concerns; I wanted to hear their stories.

My question for the Premier: Will the Premier meet with the nurses in Windsor without charging them \$6,000 a plate?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think that the Leader of the Opposition is fully aware that I meet with people all over the province—consistently, Mr. Speaker—from every sector.

We're committed, on health care, to making sure that people in Ontario have the right care, that they have it in a timely way and that they have it in the right place. To that end, funding for Windsor hospitals has increased by \$124 million. That's a 47% increase during our tenure as government. In fact, just this fiscal year, \$7 million was provided to help Windsor Regional Hospital with budget pressures and to help the transition process from a registered-nurse model to a registered-practical-nurse model.

That is work that is going on in other parts of the province. The focus of those funds was to ensure that the reduction of FTEs occurred through attrition and retirement and not through layoffs. So it's a different model. There is a transition. There is, overall in health care, a transition going on. We are working with the health care sector in every community across the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: Those are talking points to justify a \$20-million cut to Windsor Regional Hospital. But I can tell you, it's not just Wind-

sor. Last month, St. Joseph's health centre in London was forced to cut 49 full-time positions and 12 transitional care beds. Just last month, LifeLabs announced they were closing 15 patient service centres. The CEO of LifeLabs said they had to close the centres because the demand for testing had increased but funding had not.

Patients will struggle to get the testing they need done. The government has created this situation, forcing communities to close clinics and doctors' offices; they have fired nurses and front-line health care workers.

So my question is: Now that the Premier has demanded that the Minister of Health not have private, high-level fundraising dinners, will he now have the time to support physicians and nurses and stop closing labs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Once again, let me just reinforce that the way we make policy decisions on this side of the House has nothing to do with political donations, even though the innuendo on the other side of the House would suggest that. It's simply false.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What the Leader of the Opposition does not talk about is the rehiring of nurses. He doesn't talk about what's happening in one part of the sector. We've increased the percentage of nurses working full-time by 13.9% in our term of government—since 2003. There are now 26,300 more nurses working in nursing in Ontario since we took office. There has been a massive influx of nurses into the system, and we are working with communities around the province to make sure that service is delivered adequately.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: Once again, if the Premier wasn't petrified of a public inquiry, she would welcome this sunshine, this spotlight, on this topic.

We all know that doctors have been without a contract for two years. During that time, Liberals have unilaterally cut \$815 million from physicians. Further, the Minister of Health won't even meet with physicians. So my question is: Is it because the doctors didn't ante up for the Liberal fundraising calls? How many \$6,000 dinners will it take for the Premier and the Minister of Health to actually meet with our physicians in the province of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Health is very much engaged with the OMA. We would like very much to have an opportunity to sit down at the table and work out an arrangement with them.

The Leader of the Opposition may not remember, but this is the highest-paid group of physicians in the country. They have every right to earn a good wage, but the reality is that we need that opportunity to sit down with them. We're open to that. We want to work this out,

and the Minister of Health is engaged with them on a regular basis to try to get that opportunity to have the conversation with them.

1050

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. New Democrats fully support the elimination of corporate and union donations, but we know there are a number of issues that need to be resolved. Later today, I'm going to be proposing to the Premier—and the Leader of the Opposition as well—that this Legislature initiate a transparent, independent and non-partisan process to make recommendations on new rules for financing political parties and the electoral process, and new rules for governing third-party advertising and elections as well.

Will this Premier actually support a process that will be truly transparent, independent and non-partisan?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I very much look forward to the conversation this afternoon, as I already said to the Leader of the Opposition. I look forward to meeting with both leaders.

We are going to be bringing legislation forward in the spring. We are going to propose that we have an extended period of consultation, that the standing committee that is working on that piece of legislation travel the province and there be adequate and ample opportunity for people in this province to have input, so we get that legislation right.

But I think there's a high degree of agreement that we need to move forward. We need to catch up with other jurisdictions that have already changed the rules. I said last June that we needed to do this. I look forward to moving ahead with this and I look forward to the conversation this afternoon with the leaders.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Andrea Horwath: When Premier Bill Davis was faced with reforming how Ontario funded elections back in 1970, he asked a tri-partisan commission to make recommendations because he said he wanted to create "an atmosphere above and beyond public doubt, suspicion and cynicism." But this Premier appears to want to have all the power to make these decisions in her office. Why is she pushing to create a system that's open to doubt, suspicion and cynicism?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Quite to the contrary, the reason I've asked the leaders of the opposition to come in to have a meeting with me is to talk with them—and I understand that they're very interested in the subject, and they have input that they can bring from their benches and beyond. We will then have a very full discussion of that legislation in the public realm. That's what I will be proposing this afternoon.

There are some specific issues in terms of transition into the ban on corporate and union donations, some of the timing and how we should manage those. I'm looking

forward to hearing their input when we meet this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When new financing rules were passed in Ontario in 1975, an election finances commission was created. It had representatives nominated by political parties, non-partisan benchers from the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer and a chair put forward by the Lieutenant Governor of the province. It created a system that was stable for almost 25 years.

Then, in 1998, an order to eliminate the non-partisan expert commission came right from the office of Premier Mike Harris. The Premier has acknowledged that she already is writing the new rules without any consultation. Why is she following the example of Mike Harris?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I am very interested in an open process. I'm very interested in moving ahead, but I believe that there is a fair degree of consensus in terms of the direction that we need to move. I also believe that to layer process on top of process and to delay the final decision does not make sense.

I think we need to move to make the decisions that have been discussed in public for some time and that other jurisdictions have already adopted. We need to take those steps to move expeditiously. I look forward to our meeting this afternoon so we can get started.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. When Mike Harris decided get rid of this non-partisan system by fiat from the Premier's office, the current member for St. Catharines called it an "anti-democratic strategy, hatched in the back rooms of the Premier's office." John Gerretsen, the former Liberal member for Kingston and the Islands, said, "What's happening here is that the governing party that happens to be in power at any one time is going to have a distinct advantage above the normal advantages of incumbency." Former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty said that there are "simple rules of fairness.... You can't change the rules of the game without the consent of all the players involved."

So why is this Premier hatching plans in the back-rooms of the Premier's office instead of through a non-partisan process that gets Ontarians to buy in?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, I would say to the leader of the third party: Why is she not talking about the substance of the changes that need to happen? Why is she not putting forward ideas about how she thinks the system needs to change? Because that actually is the issue.

Instead of talking about how we can have more process that will actually delay the final decision, why is the leader of the third party not putting forward her ideas on what the transition should be between the current system and the changes, banning corporate and union do-

nations? Why is the leader of the third party not talking about third-party advertising? Why is she not talking about the kinds of changes that she would like to see? Those are the subjects that I'm looking forward to having a conversation about this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Toronto Star weighed in at the time as well. They said, "The rules governing elections have been changed only when there has been a consensus among the three parties in the Legislature." Maclean's wrote: "For 25 years, election financing bills in Ontario have been tabled with all-party consensus, but Ontario Premier Mike Harris tossed aside that tradition." And Richard Brennan, who at that time was working for my own Hamilton Spectator, wrote: "The government broke tradition yesterday by tabling proposed legislation affecting the Election Finances Act without first getting all-party consent."

Why does this Premier believe that she alone should be writing the rules?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I don't believe that. I don't believe that for a minute. I think that there has already begun a broad public discussion. I think that there is a fair degree of consensus on where we need to go. I have heard from certainly the Leader of the Opposition where he thinks we need to go in terms of banning corporate and union donations. I'd love to hear from the leader of the third party the substance of her ideas.

I look forward to that conversation this afternoon, where perhaps we will be able to talk about the direction we should go so we can build some consensus among ourselves. We can then begin that public discussion as a result of the introduction of legislation into which there has been input from all sides of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It is definitely time to take big money out of politics. It's time to get rid of corporate and union donations. But this Premier is actually choosing a partisan route that was begun by Mike Harris instead of our proud history of consensus. Can this Premier explain why she's tossing out decades of tradition and deciding that decisions should be made in the backrooms of the Premier's office?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I am doing is I am responding to a moment in time where there are other jurisdictions that have moved in a particular direction and have made changes that I believe we need to make. We are updating a system that has grown out of date. I said a year ago, in June, that we needed to make changes. I am looking for input from all sides of the House. There has been a public discussion in the last number of weeks that has been precipitated by the media, and it's a welcome and important discussion.

So I look forward to hearing from the leaders of the opposition. I look forward to the public discussion that will ensue once we bring legislation to the House and it then goes to committee. Across the province, people can

have input into how they think that legislation should change the rules under which we all operate.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. On Friday, the Environmental Review Tribunal granted a stay of construction for the White Pines wind turbine project in Prince Edward county, an unwilling host community. Under the terms of the contract, this project has to be finished its construction and attached to the grid by mid-June of this year. If it isn't, wpd has defaulted on the terms of their contract and the taxpayers can get out of it without a cost—that is, unless they get an extension, which only the Minister of Energy can give them.

My question is: Will the minister be granting an extension to wpd or will they have to be operational by June?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is before the Environmental Review Tribunal right now. They have not made a ruling yet. They have issued a statement that they will be consulting with both parties to look at the consequences. We operate the ERT on the weight of convenience, which means that they look at harm about outcomes in making their decisions. As there can be an appeal to me and to this government, it's very important that we, as the House, protect the integrity of that process and not pull it aside.

1100

I would suggest that we allow the RT process to proceed as an independent process, and at the right and appropriate point when appeals can happen from the RT—but I don't think we should be commenting on it in this House until that process is complete.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Todd Smith: Back to the Premier: The people of Prince Edward county are watching this government's every move. The IESO can uphold the current terms of the contract, but if wpd wants an extension, they can only get it from the Minister of Energy. Wpd have also contributed \$15,000 to the Ontario Liberal Party, most of it since the environmental review process began.

Speaker, my question to the Premier is simple: Will she require the IESO to enforce the current terms of the contract, which would put wpd in default if they aren't connected by mid-June? Or has wpd already bought themselves an extension?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. This is the moment in which I've alerted all members that I will be listening carefully to this. I'm going to ask the member, if the theme is there, to be very cautious of how he impugns any motive. You will need to do some homework on that to ensure that it's not happening.

Minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to recognize that there are people here in the gallery from the local Prince

Edward–Hastings business and tourism board. I want to recognize the efforts that they are taking to work through a democratic process.

But I also want to deal with the last point the member made—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're not endearing yourself by repeating what I asked not to be repeated.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to make one point here, Mr. Speaker. Through this process, our job—mine and the member for Hastings–Prince Edward county's—is to protect the integrity of this process. I'm very clear and have no difficulties doing that. I find it deeply, deeply offensive that someone would suggest, in a process in which politicians are not allowed to interfere—he is actually suggesting I interfere in that process—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

You have one-sentence to wrap up, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: So shame on him, Mr. Speaker, because it sounds like the pot is calling the kettle black here.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Premier.

For 25 years, it was the practice to have consensus among Ontario's political parties before changing the rules about election campaigns. Bill Davis established a multi-partisan election finances committee in 1975 that included the Chief Electoral Officer and non-partisan members of the legal community to ensure that there was fairness. David Peterson changed the rules, but only after extensive discussions with the other leaders and the same elections commission. But when Mike Harris changed the rules, it came straight from the Premier's office.

Is this Premier going to be following in the footsteps of Bill Davis and David Peterson, or will she keep all of the decision-making power in the Premier's office, just like Mike Harris?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the only person who would be more agitated about me being compared to Mike Harris is Mike Harris, because, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we didn't see eye to eye on anything, including on this.

I think it's very important that there be a public process. I think it's very important that we look for the consensus along the political continuum. I think that moving to where other jurisdictions, including the federal government—it's a process that began under a Liberal government and continued under the Conservative government; that we move to that consensus position that other jurisdictions have taken.

I look forward to the conversation with the leaders of the opposition. I have said that we will be introducing legislation that has many of the components that other jurisdictions have already adopted, but I look forward to

the conversation with the leaders of the opposition parties because there may be some issues in terms of transition and so on that they would like to share with me.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think it's important for the Premier to understand that Ontarians, and most of the people in this House, don't think that you're going to get this right on fundraising.

Ontario's New Democrats want to see a process that ensures that the new rules are developed through an independent and transparent and non-partisan process and, once passed into law, have the broad support of Ontarians required to ensure their legitimacy and their respect.

Will the Premier commit to taking this process out of her backrooms and make this a non-partisan and transparent process led by consensus among Ontario's political parties?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think what the third party is asking for is more process that will delay the decision. That is not what we are going to do. What we are going to do is put in place a process whereby there will be broad input from people across the province. There will be broad public discussion. We will extend the hearings and make sure that there is a longer period for that consultation.

In the interim, the input that I'm looking for from the leaders of the opposition parties—yes, I'm having a meeting today; I look forward to that. But as we draft the legislation, if there is input that they would like to give us, we look forward to that, and then we will be able to get on with that broad public discussion that I think is necessary.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, the young people in my riding of Davenport often find trouble navigating the barriers to getting involved in the process of finding a job. I often hear that they lack the direction and guidance they need to make informed decisions and find good jobs that will contribute to their growth as a professional. This is especially the case for young people who face multiple barriers to employment resulting from some combination of complex, challenging life circumstances.

Minister, I understand that you recently announced the launch of a new summer program aimed at helping young people overcome challenges and barriers to finding suitable, meaningful employment. Can you please inform the members of the House on how this new program will help our most vulnerable youth access the necessary training and employment services to find meaningful jobs?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Davenport for that very good question. Early last week, my ministry was pleased to launch a summer component of Ontario's Youth Job Connection program. Youth Job

Connection is a key component of our government's youth jobs strategy. I am proud to say that through this strategy, our government is investing an additional \$250 million over two years to help roughly 27,000 of Ontario's students to find part-time and full-time jobs.

The Youth Job Connection summer program will provide part-time and after-school job opportunities to high school students aged 15 to 18 who face challenging life circumstances and may need support transitioning between school and work. This is one of the two new programs we announced last week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you to the minister for the answer. Minister, when youth face barriers to opportunity based on background or circumstance, it is the responsibility of this government to make sure that they have access to the training they need to help them grow their skills and join the workforce. It is reassuring to the young people in my riding that the summer component of Youth Job Connection is now in place to help them gain access to the labour market.

I understand this program is part of our government's commitment to strengthening Ontario's Youth Jobs Strategy, which will help support a comprehensive suite of new youth employment programs.

Many constituents in my riding of Davenport would be happy to know more about another program that launched last week to help young people with fewer barriers to access services that are available year-round. Minister, could you inform myself and the members of the House on Youth Job Link, another new program that is now in place to support young people across our province?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for that question. Helping youth of all abilities and backgrounds access the most effective employment and training is part of our government's economic plan to grow the economy and create jobs in this province.

With that goal in mind, last week Ontario also launched Youth Job Link, which is helping young people aged 15 to 29 plan their careers, prepare for the labour market and connect to job opportunities. The Youth Job Link program will be available year-round to youth and students at more than 320 locations across our province. It will offer information on career options, help with resumé writing and preparing for interviews, and assistance to match their skills with employers' needs.

With Youth Job Connection's summer component as well as the Youth Job Link program in place, Ontario has the right combination of programs in place to help youth with a broad spectrum of backgrounds, abilities and needs get the training they need to actively participate in our economy.

1110

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. The Sudbury by-election allowed the Liberal Party to raise

\$2.2 million. That's just shy of the \$2.6 million they raised in the last general election. Some may ask: How could they do that? Well, they had prolific Liberal bagman Gerry Lougheed Jr. up there in Sudbury—a man notorious for making promises in exchange for favours, a man who is under investigation and facing corruption charges.

Mr. Speaker, how many promises did Gerry Lougheed Jr. make in exchange for donations to the Liberal Party?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy government House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It's interesting; I have a favourite Biblical quotation for the member, and it comes from the New Testament. It's John 8:7. I'll paraphrase: Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

If you and your leader were so interested in reforming fundraising in this province, you'll be wondering about that \$5,000-a-person dinner at Barberian's and whether you're going to cancel it; or that \$10,000-a-person dinner at the Albany Club with an exclusive 10 in the province; or that your leader's dinner donors are encouraged to pay \$25,000 for a victory table—\$10,000 more than the normal table—for an opportunity to host a caucus member.

Your party is living, sir, I say through the leader, in a glass house. I advise you not to throw stones.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Start the clock.

Supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm not sure, Speaker, if that was an admission of guilt, with that dodge and deflection from the government. But I'm sure that the member opposite will agree with me: We know Gerry Lougheed Jr. can fundraise. He once raised \$115,000 in a single night for Justin Trudeau at a swanky \$1,300-a-plate dinner in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Easy.

Finish, please.

Mr. Steve Clark: Gerry Lougheed Jr. is facing corruption charges. He allegedly promised a job to Andrew Olivier in exchange for stepping down. How do we know, Speaker, that he didn't make promises as part of those donations in the Liberal by-election in Sudbury?

The member opposite likes to make a number of quotes. I'll make a quote today: "The best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour." That's why we, on this side of the House, are asking for an inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, does the Premier have anything to hide, with the millions of dollars raised—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I think if the member would go through the list of donations, he would find out that none other than the Progressive Conservative Party has

received donations from Gerry Lougheed. So I ask the question: Did that have any influence on anything that is done by the Conservative Party?

Mr. Speaker, when I read about a fundraiser, such as the \$10,000-a-person fundraiser at the Albany Club, I watch carefully the next day or at the next House sitting to see what questions are asked in the House, because one might draw the conclusion, when one sees who is at that dinner and then listens to the questions in the House or the stance taken by the opposition—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, second time.

Mr. Steve Clark: I just want an answer.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville is warned—next comment.

Wrap up, please.

Hon. James J. Bradley: One always wonders, when there's a fundraiser and the questions come in the House and the stance is taken, whether people at that fundraiser had any influence on Conservative Party policy.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. Hospitals in London are grappling with another year of deep cuts under this Liberal government. In the past two weeks, we've learned that St. Joseph's and London Health Sciences are both cutting the equivalent of 60 full-time positions. Budgets for supplies are being cut, and 12 crucial transitional care beds will be shut down this October.

People in my community want to know: Why is this Premier forcing hospitals in London to cut patient care, lay off front-line staff and shut down even more beds?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member opposite, when she is in conversation with constituents, will remind the constituents that the budget actually puts \$1 billion more into health care in this province, including \$345 million for hospital funding.

In terms of the number of nurses in this province, in terms of the number of doctors, there have been thousands more nurses and doctors in this province in our term of government: 26,300 more nurses in this province as a result of our policies.

We will continue to support the health care system. We will continue to work with individual health care systems and hospitals around the province, including in London, and make sure that people get the health care that they need in a timely manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: When I'm speaking to constituents, they're reminding me about the health care policies that this Liberal government is causing to fail the services in health care.

Again to the Premier: Hospitals in London have revealed just how deeply this Liberal government is cutting health care. St. Joseph's has seen effectively a \$36.5-million cut to its total budget over the past four

years. London Health Sciences says that the year 2016-17 marks the fifth straight year that funding will not keep up with rising costs. And we all know who pays the price for these cuts. It's patients who wait longer for care they need; it's families who are forced to deal with more worry and more stress; and it's the front-line health care workers who don't deserve a pink slip from this government.

How can this Premier once again slash funding to hospitals in London and expect patient health care not to suffer?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We recognized in this budget that there was a need to increase funding to hospitals. That's why there's a \$345-million increase to hospitals in the province.

I had talked with CEOs of hospitals. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care had talked with hospital CEOs. We understood that there needed to be an increase. That's why there's \$1 billion more in health care overall and \$345 million for hospitals.

St. Joseph's Healthcare—that's the Hamilton St. Joseph's Healthcare—system received \$395 million in 2015-16 in base funding, and that's a 48% increase since 2003. So over that period of time, a 48% increase, and that's just one hospital across the province. There have been increases, and \$345 million in this year's budget.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. After each municipal election cycle, it's regular practice for the ministry to conduct a review of the rules governing municipal elections. Last week in the House, the minister introduced proposed changes via Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

We're all aware that our local communities are critical hubs of democratic activity and an important entry point into Ontario's governance system. That's why our municipalities and local leaders need to be supported by strong, clear and modern rules.

Mr. Speaker, these are important goals. Through you, can the minister explain how these goals are going to be reflected in this bill?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the honourable member for his question. I'll certainly do the best I can to answer it. He's correct: After each election we do a consultation. This time around, we had 3,400 submissions from councils, citizens and staff in municipalities. In turn, based on that, we looked closely at changes to campaign finance rules; regulating third-party advertising; challenges and barriers to making elections accessible; increasing, of course, transparency and accountability and allowing more local choice; the length of the campaign period; and whether municipal election rules are effectively enforced.

Mr. Speaker, if this bill should be fortunate enough to be passed, there will be improvements in all those areas, and I look forward to the bill moving through the House.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: As a former municipal councillor, I very much appreciate the changes that have been proposed to make our elections more effective and more transparent.

But in addition to those goals, the minister has put in place a new objective, and that is to give our municipalities the option to have ranked ballots in the 2018 municipal election. This is a new frontier in Ontario, and this goal has garnered a lot of attention throughout the province. Our municipal partners have been asking us whether we could move forward with these for 2018 for their communities.

Can the minister share what he and his team have been hearing and working on with respect to ranked ballots?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I can do that. The majority of feedback we received during our consultation, in fact, had to do with ranked ballots, which is why we proposed to make that an option for our municipal partners. The sense was, in the letters that we received, with voter turnout going down and seemingly less interest in municipal elections, that we needed a way to help engage more voters in the process and, also, one that would enhance the process itself by having it be more substantive in terms of debate and what have you.

We think we've done that in a number of ways, ranked ballots being one. Of course, it will be optional, and our hope is that it would get us away from some of the negative campaigning that so often happens in political arenas.

We look forward to continuing to work with communities. They deserve the best possible municipal leadership, and we think the changes in Bill 181 will help ensure that.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Premier. A year ago, the Minister of Health was asked by Christine Elliott to expand full stroke recovery services for those individuals between the ages of 20 through 64. She referenced the circumstances of a local Durham resident, Jim McEwen, who has championed changes to the legislation. Unless covered by private insurance, post-stroke survivors cannot receive the essential rehabilitation services that are needed for recovery. The minister responded at that time, "My ministry for some time has been working on the precise issue that she has raised." Mr. Speaker, one year—one year—after that statement was made in this House, nothing further has been forthcoming to help post-stroke survivors.

When will the Premier and her government start to satisfy not only the expectation of Ontario residents, but their actual commitments?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I thank the member opposite for the question and his ongoing advocacy. I just want to say, as we all know, that Minister Hoskins is absolutely

committed to putting patients first and making sure Ontarians get the health care they deserve.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, in this budget we've increased base funding for Ontario's hospitals by \$345 million, including a 1% increase to base funding. This is an investment that will keep not only hospitals open across our system, but also ensure that Ontarians get the care they deserve.

We are making investments across the health care sector. Let me just give you an example: On Friday, I was up in Cochrane only to announce the redevelopment of 69 new beds. These are the examples of the investments we continue to make in health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Again to the Premier: Will the Premier now admit that she has been unable to implement this essential reform because of the inability of her government to adequately manage the health care system?

Is this not simply further evidence of the systemic problems inherent with a government mired in its own scandal, waste and mismanagement, or do post-stroke survivors have to attend \$6,000 Liberal dinners to get their voices heard?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I just want to talk a little bit about some of the rehab services that we have been investing in. For example, with our changes, we have doubled the number of publicly funded physiotherapy clinics in Ontario. In total, 200,000 additional seniors will have improved access to high-quality physiotherapy. By the end of 2014, CCACs provided in-home services to an additional 35,000 clients. Mr. Speaker, we have set no limits on physiotherapy sessions, to ensure that Ontarians get the rehab services that they need.

I can assure this House that when the minister is back he will be able to speak at length about some of the investments we continue to make. I can assure this House that our minister and our Premier are committed to ensuring Ontarians get the services they need and deserve at the right time.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier.

Supervised access sites are a way for families going through often adversarial family matters where children are involved to have a neutral and, as the name suggests, supervised visit between a non-custodial parent and their children.

In Hamilton, supervised access has been provided professionally and compassionately for years by the downtown YWCA. But the Y has not received an increase in base funding for eight straight years and has now had to cut back on the hours, the days—the access—that struggling families desperately need. It is so bad that the Y has now been forced to remove five families from the wait-list that already stretches into years.

Does the Premier think it's okay that her government is preventing children from seeing their parents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member of the third party for her question.

Of course, it's always the intent, on the government side, to keep families intact wherever possible, to keep families with their children where possible, where they can be safe and secure and healthy. If that's not the case, we want to make sure that all of our partners in the sector who are mandated to look after children achieve that objective, whether it's a children's aid society or a partner agency.

I'd be very happy to talk to the leader of the third party about the specifics of this case, recognizing that I can't comment on individual children or their family situation. But our goal remains the same: We are resolute in ensuring that children receive their supports and the services they need to be protected and to reach their full potential.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect to the minister, that's exactly the opposite of what's happening here in Hamilton. Supervised access isn't even a choice for struggling families; it is a court-ordered process.

Supervised access centres place the focus on children. As one Hamilton mother described it to me, the supervised access site at the Y helps "keep families together in a healthy way," which "leads to well-adjusted children turning into well-adjusted adults."

What does the Premier and her minister say to this mother and to all families who are desperate for supervised access for the sake of their families but who can't get it because the government refuses to adequately fund it?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I am open to the advice of the third party. Obviously, we do respect and uphold court orders when it comes to the care and protection of children in our province. I'll be pleased to speak to her, as well as my colleague ministries who provide funding for local community groups.

At the end of the day, it is about what's best for our children; it's about what's best to help them reach their full potential.

Of course, we want to recognize and respect the court orders. Each situation often has its own circumstances.

As I said, I'd be happy to hear from the leader of the third party or my critic about the case in general, and then we can respond, perhaps, more specifically to her.

ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

The minister has recently announced a number of investments targeted towards driving economic development and creating jobs in indigenous communities.

Just last month, I had the opportunity to announce funding for two programs in my riding of Kingston and the Islands that provide support for aboriginal students: St. Lawrence College's project Kickstart College; and the Self-Identification Project at Queen's University, de-

veloped and run by Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre.

These investments reflect the government's commitment to work with indigenous partners and indigenous youth to create a better future for everyone in the province.

Can the minister please elaborate on the steps our government is taking to create economic opportunities for indigenous communities in Ontario?

1130

Hon. David Zimmer: The Ontario government wants to ensure that indigenous peoples have the opportunity to succeed and to fully participate in the economy. Our government is moving forward on many fronts by creating initiatives that are supporting business growth and providing economic development opportunities, jobs and skill sets for aboriginal peoples.

That's why we're doing the following four things: \$322,000 for the Timmins Native Friendship Centre through the aboriginal community grants program; \$175,000 to support a new welcome centre in Akwesasne; \$200,000 for Miziwe Biik to develop employment and training opportunities for indigenous peoples here in Toronto; and \$481,000 for a Kagita Mikam aboriginal employment and training centre to attract, hire, train and retain indigenous apprenticeships in skilled trades.

This is good for aboriginal economic development. It's good for Ontario's economic development.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's clear that our government is committed to working with indigenous partners to create good jobs and economic opportunities in indigenous communities, because we all recognize that creating economic opportunities for indigenous peoples strengthens Ontario's economy. When indigenous people prosper, all of Ontario prospers.

I understand that these recent announcements are part of larger initiatives to promote economic development opportunities for indigenous peoples. Through initiatives such as the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund and the Aboriginal Loan Guarantee Program, our government is creating stronger, more effective partnerships with indigenous communities.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister please tell us more about how the government is working to ensure that indigenous people have the opportunity to succeed and fully participate in the economy through the AEDF?

Hon. David Zimmer: Our government introduced the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund in the 2014 budget. It was to help aboriginal businesses, communities and organizations create, diversify and collaborate in their economic development. As a result, to date Ontario has funded 44 projects with indigenous partners through this fund.

Partnerships like these reflect the government's commitment to work with indigenous partners to create a better future for everyone in the province. That is why our government launched the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund: to create these initiatives that support

economic growth, and provide opportunities for jobs and skills for aboriginal peoples.

Supporting economic development for indigenous communities through this fund is just one of the many, many steps on Ontario's journey of healing and reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Last month, the minister met with me and a delegation from Renfrew county to go over the frequently-talked-about continued twinning of Highway 17. While the project will reach Scheel Drive this year, the next phase has yet to make it into the ministry's five-year plan.

The minister knows that this project is vital to the economy of Renfrew county as a transportation corridor. It connects Canadian Nuclear Laboratories and Garrison Petawawa to the nation's capital, and is a major artery for commercial truck traffic.

Given how crucially important this roadway is, will the minister commit to putting the further twinning of Highway 17 into his ministry's five-year plan?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, not only for his question but also for his advocacy on this issue. He was good enough to join the municipal representatives from his community who I had the pleasure of meeting with. We had a fantastic conversation.

Both the ministry and myself recognize the importance of this particular highway project and the impact that it will have as we continue to four-lane through the county of Renfrew. I can assure that member that I will continue to work closely with his community. The ministry understands the importance of this particular artery in eastern Ontario, and we'll continue to have conversations as we go forward.

The member should also know—I believe he does, Speaker—that the environmental assessment for the next phase is being completed, and the ministry will continue to work with his community on this project.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I say to the minister that we appreciate the work that has been done up until now, but we cannot stop.

The minister's predecessors asked the county government to make the case for the continued twinning of Highway 17, and I believe they have made that case over and over again in spades. It's now up to the minister.

He would also know that the federal government has made favourable overtures regarding infrastructure investments. Given that this is a Trans-Canada highway, I would ask that the minister take advantage of the federal infrastructure commitment and place the highest priority on this project. Four-laning will be a boon to Renfrew county both economically and socially, as well as making the route safer for everyone who travels it.

Speaker, I'll ask the minister again if he will commit to putting the next phase of twinning Highway 17 into his ministry's five-year capital infrastructure plan.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member opposite for his follow-up question. I also want to thank him for acknowledging that we now have a federal government in Ottawa that understands the importance of investing in crucial infrastructure.

I believe that member also knows that in this year, 2015-16, the Ontario Liberal government has committed more than \$2.4 billion to expand and rehabilitate roads, bridges and highways right across the province of Ontario. Budget 2016 included a number of these crucial projects.

Not that many days ago, I joined with a number of my colleagues. We were down in the community of Puslinch, where we announced funding support in that community, in Wellington, for the Morriston bypass, which I know is of crucial economic importance to that part of our province.

Speaker, as I said in my initial answer, I'll continue to work with that member and with his community to make sure that, going forward, perhaps in partnership with the new Liberal government in Ottawa, we'll get this done.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you would have heard, like all Ontarians, the tragedy that is taking place in Attawapiskat as we speak.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that we've seen a rash of suicides on the James Bay. In fact, about five years ago, we had a similar situation going on. Myself, Payukotayno, and others from the James Bay, along with then-Grand Chief Stan Louttit, went to your government and asked for money for Payukotayno in order to put in place the staff necessary to deal with this on an ongoing, long-term basis—and your government did it; I'll give you some credit. But two years later, you took that money away.

We got over \$1 million in order to hire staff to be able to do the work that helps prevent these types of things from happening. My question to you is, if you make a commitment to do something this time, will you take the money out once the media has gone away?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very worried and very concerned about what's happening in Attawapiskat and, quite frankly, in other remote northern communities as well.

The member opposite knows that I've been to Attawapiskat. I know that there are myriad concerns within the community, whether it's housing or whether it's counselling and support, as the member opposite has said.

We've assured Chief Bellegarde that our government is convinced of and committed to supporting First Nations communities in their times of need. In fact, Minister Hoskins will be travelling to Attawapiskat this week. But in the interim, as we speak, there is assistance

leaving from our government's resources to go to Attawapiskat right now.

We will do everything we can to put the supports in place. I know the member opposite knows that the concerns are multi-faceted. There's not just one thing that has to be done. There are a number of concerns, and we'll be working with the community.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I agree with you, Premier: It is a multi-faceted response that's needed to a very complex issue, and there's not enough time in question period to go through it.

But what I want to know, and I think what the people of James Bay and Attawapiskat want to know, is that there is a long-term commitment to what is a huge problem in our communities. When you have 11 people in one day, from age 11 to age 71, who try to take their life because of the situation in their community, I think people need to know that the response on the part of our provincial and federal governments—because we're the ones who do social services in those communities—whether it's child and youth services—we're the ones who run the hospitals that provide the services in those communities.

We need to have an assurance that whatever we do going forward from here is going to be an ongoing and long-term commitment, and we're not going to pull it away once the cameras have moved away from the story.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite, apart from the innuendo at the end that somehow this is about the lights and the cameras. That's not at all what this is about. This is about long-term, sustained support that we are working to put in place across the province, working with the federal government.

1140

The Minister of Children and Youth Services will also be going this week to make sure that the resources that we are sending and the resources that are in place are adequate. Where they need to be enhanced, we need to figure out how to do that, and we have to work in partnership with the First Nation and with the federal government.

I agree with the member opposite. I think he knows that. I think he knows that my concern—and it's not solely in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, although that is a new part of the context within which we're working. We will continue to work with the umbrella organizations, with NAN and with the AFN but, most specifically, with the communities, each of which has a particular set of concerns. My ministers will be going this week to make sure that we are sending the right resources that can be there to support in the short and the long term.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Prince Edward—Hastings has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the

answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change concerning the granting of an extension of wpd's wind turbine project in Prince Edward county. This matter will be debated tomorrow at 6 p.m.

Also pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Whitby—Oshawa has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care concerning post-stroke services. This matter will be debated tomorrow at 6 p.m.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I just wanted to extend my warm welcome to Sprague Plato, who is the board chair of the Parkinson Society Ottawa. Sprague was in the House earlier, and I want to thank him for the amazing community service he delivers in our great city of Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have the great pleasure to introduce Ms. Olive Dodds and her daughter, Catherine Parley, and her friends and fellow volunteers at Michael Garron Hospital—Margaret Langmuir, Marianne Boivie and Eric Sigurdson—as well as MGH representatives Denny Petkovski and Justin Van Dette. They're here in the members' gallery today. I welcome you to Queen's Park.

Speaker, I also have the pleasure of introducing Kelly Doctor and Nadine Blum, who are here today to witness the reading of a petition they started on daycare wait-list fees. Welcome, Kelly and Nadine.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PARKINSON'S AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm rising today to highlight Parkinson's Awareness Month and the wonderful work that the Parkinson Society Canada accomplishes day in and day out.

Parkinson's is a neurodegenerative disease occurring when the transmission of dopamine decreases. Signs and symptoms relating to the development of Parkinson's disease can include tremor, slowness and stiffness, impaired balance, rigidity of the muscles, fatigue, soft speech, problems with handwriting, stooped posture, constipation and sleep disturbances. Diagnosing Parkinson's can take time, and our family doctors are most likely to catch the signs and symptoms first.

As there is currently no cure for this disease, one can live with Parkinson's for years before realizing that

something is wrong. Those suffering from Parkinson's disease can benefit from certain medications and therapies designed to target areas of discomfort.

There are 55,000 Canadians aged 18 or older living with Parkinson's disease. The average age when signs and symptoms are first experienced occurs roughly around 64 years old. There's an increasing amount of Canadians—43%—who feel embarrassed by their condition. Close to two thirds of those suffering from Parkinson's also report out-of-pocket expenses associated with the disease. Spouses tend to be the primary caregiver in most cases, placing strain on family relationships.

Until a cure is found, I wish continued strength to those fighting this terrible disease and commend the Parkinson Society Canada, the health care professionals and family members who look after their loved ones with Parkinson's disease. I hope someday we can be here at the Legislature and report that a cure has been found for this terrible disease.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: This month, the government announced that it will require all students from grades 1 to 8 to have at least 60 minutes of math instruction a day, starting in September. While progress in math is measured by standardized testing, progress in subjects like arts, science, geography and citizenship is much harder to quantify.

Students with exceptional learning and language needs, like those who attend specialized provincial and demonstration schools, must also be recognized and supported. These schools provide students with the opportunity to excel in subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic.

For months, families with children who attend these schools have pleaded with the government to recognize their importance and commit to keeping these schools open. Rather than commit to the long-term viability of these schools, the government capped enrolment, announced consultations and has now closed enrolment for next year.

Consultations have ended, and parents want to know: Will this government listen to families and education workers by keeping these schools open or will they turn their backs on our most vulnerable?

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: We have some very important guests from Comcast and NBC with us today: Rick Smotkin, Brian O'Leary and Randi Richmond. Because we have these special guests here, I thought I'd take a moment to discuss film and television production in Ontario.

Our government has combined superb talent and state-of-the-art infrastructure with competitive financial

incentives that support Ontario's continued success as the number one film and television production centre in Canada and the third largest in North America. I'm pleased to say that the latest statistics for film and television production in Ontario reinforced this.

Earlier this year, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport announced that 2015 was the best year ever for film and television production in Ontario. Last year, film and television production supported by the province contributed \$1.5 billion to the economy, the fifth consecutive year they've hit the billion-dollar mark. These statistics also show an increase of almost 4,500 jobs over the previous year, for a total of 32,500 full-time and spin-off jobs.

In Etobicoke-Lakeshore, the global HQ of William F. White and Cinespace studios also support these jobs and this success. This steady growth has led to a dynamic television and movie sector. Mr. Speaker, that's money going directly into Ontario's economy, money that is helping to build Ontario up.

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This week marks National Volunteer Week, a week to celebrate and thank all of our local volunteers. In Perth-Wellington, we are lucky to have many outstanding volunteers whose contributions are invaluable.

Last week, I was pleased to recognize some of them at the United Way's Perth-Huron Spirit of Community Celebration. Thanks to generous community donations and the hard work of our volunteers, the United Way raised a record \$1.2 million.

Earlier in March, I had the privilege of attending the volunteer service awards in Stratford along with my colleagues the MPPs from Huron-Bruce and Oxford. I presented scrolls to 147 hard-working volunteers.

Many organizations across Perth-Wellington are hosting special events this week to thank their volunteers. The Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance has over 400 volunteers who provide more than 42,000 hours of service. They are hosting a volunteer lunch to thank them. The Volunteer Centre of Guelph/Wellington is planting a volunteer garden and hosting the Time to Give Breakfast, honouring employer-supported volunteerism. Many of our local municipalities are also presenting special awards of long-serving volunteers.

To all of our local volunteers in Perth-Wellington, I say thank you. Your time, service and dedication are very much appreciated. This week, I encourage everyone to celebrate our volunteers and consider volunteering for a local organization.

HYDRO REBATES

M^{me} France Gélinas: My constituent Mr. Pete Leduc came into our office when he got a notice from Hydro One encouraging him to apply for the Ontario Electricity

Support Program, which he did. Like most people in Nickel Belt, he had no idea that Hydro One was offering low-income customers a rebate. He found out when his March Hydro One bill came in the mail with a flyer about the program in the bill.

It takes six to eight weeks for the people to find out if they qualify; that means this program, which started on January 1, may not be helping my constituents until May or June. I think this isn't fair.

Mr. Leduc—and I agree—wants his rebate to be retroactive to January 1, and I think that's right. Not enough was done to make people aware of this program. We did a search of news stories related to this rebate; there weren't enough to fill a page and most were related to how complicated the program is and how little uptake there has been from consumers so far.

Low-income families in Nickel Belt are not scanning the Hydro One website to find discounts. They're just too busy trying to make ends meet. I have two questions for the government: Why was a flyer for a program that started in January in our March Hydro One bill and not before? And second, will the government do the right thing and backdate this rebate to January 1 for everyone that applies before the end of April?

COMMUNITY AWARDS

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm delighted to rise today to speak about the many wonderful community leaders we have in Halton.

The Milton, Oakville and Burlington chambers of commerce recently held their community awards celebrations. I was fortunate to be able to attend the Milton event. It highlighted some of the passionate and hard-working people in our community. The evening showcased Milton's appreciation for our hard-working residents and business people who contribute so much to our community and economy.

This year, the chamber awarded several deserving people awards, recognizing their tireless efforts to build our community up. Some of these remarkable individuals are Brian Penman, Rebecca Hunter, and Denise and Peter Mule.

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In addition, several important businesses were also recognized, including Pasqualino, Dean DeFazio with snapd, iDrinkCoffee.com, C.F. Crozier and Associates and J. Currie Plumbing. In Burlington and Oakville, other members of the community and businesses included Geotab, Surround Integrated, El Spero Family Restaurant, the Oakville Hospital Foundation and many others.

I want to congratulate all of the award recipients and nominees. You are some of our region's finest, and we are grateful for your tireless efforts, dedication and vision. Thank you to all of our chambers for organizing these wonderful events.

VIMY FOUNDATION

Mr. Michael Harris: On April 2, I was pleased to attend an event in support of the Vimy Foundation,

whose mission is to preserve Canada's First World War legacy.

Today, I stand with Canadians across our nation to commemorate the 99th anniversary of the victory at Vimy Ridge, where, for the first time in history, the four divisions of the Canadian Corps fought together, attacking the French ridge and succeeding in capturing it from the German army.

In order to ensure Canada's heroic history is forever memorialized, the Vimy Foundation develops education programs to help youth and Canadians of all ages learn more about the sacrifices made by an entire generation, when Canada truly came of age—the moment where, many historians agree, our nation was born.

This time next year, Canada will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, and the Vimy Foundation is working tirelessly to commemorate that battle. The Vimy Foundation believes that the key to a successful future lies in knowing one's past. To that end, next year, we look forward to their unveiling of a state-of-the-art visitor education centre and centennial park located near the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France.

It's always a privilege to recognize our troops, veterans and their families, and it's my honour to stand here today to recognize those who support them. Thank you to the Vimy Foundation, and I wish you nothing but success in your upcoming centennial celebration.

OLIVE DODDS

Mr. Arthur Potts: National Volunteer Week is upon us, and today I would like to take the opportunity to recognize a very special volunteer from my riding of Beaches–East York. Her name is Olive Dodds, and, as I mentioned in the introduction, she's in the east gallery with some family and friends. The theme of this year's Volunteer Week is "Volunteers are the roots of strong communities." I truly believe that Mrs. Dodds embodies this theme in her regular work at Michael Garron Hospital.

Olive began volunteering at Michael Garron in 1985, while it was still named Toronto East General Hospital. She started when she was 75 years old, and is believed to be Ontario's longest-serving hospital volunteer. Now, do the math, Speaker: Olive is well past her 100th year.

Over the past 30 years, Olive has contributed to growth in our community through her commitment and dedication to volunteering her time and expertise at MGH. Olive and her group of volunteers have knitted a countless numbers of dolls that are sold to raise funds for the hospital and have helped bring smiles to many of our hospital's smallest patients.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Olive Dodds and the thousands of other volunteers across our province for their commitment and their service to their communities. I would ask my fellow members to join me in congratulating this exceptional volunteer and all those like her who selflessly commit themselves to serving our

communities. She's a shining example for all of us to follow.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did the math, and, yes, you are right: She is very young.

TERRY FOX EXHIBIT

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: This past Saturday, in my community of Waterloo region, the museum had a special opening of an extraordinary exhibit. "Terry Fox: Running to the Heart of Canada" opened in Kitchener. Several Cambridge residents were on hand to hear the opening, including my twelve-year-old son, Declan McGarry.

David Marskell from the museum introduced a special guest, Darrell Fox, Terry's brother, who spoke passionately and movingly about his experience of joining his brother partway through the run.

Darrell often talks about running as well, and he kind of jokes some days; he thought he ran more than Terry because he zigzagged through the crowd trying to obtain donations, but he hadn't done it day in and day out, as Terry had done. He was still in awe of his brother.

After talking about this, he actually answered questions, signed books and talked about his experiences taking photographs. He said that the Marathon of Hope changed his family's life forever.

Then we toured the exhibit. Words cannot express what it was like as we saw the jug of the Atlantic Ocean water that Terry had scooped up in Newfoundland and that he had intended to dump into the Pacific Ocean at the end. As we know, his journey ended tragically near Thunder Bay, Ontario. His prosthetic leg, his shoes, his shorts, his t-shirts and his sock full of holes were on display. His journals, his meticulous documentation of every mile he ran and how many he had left, were there on display.

Speaker, he ran a full marathon—42 kilometres—a day, every day. His mental toughness, his dedication to raise awareness and research dollars for the Canadian Cancer Society is an overwhelming and inspirational story. Why did he do it? Precisely to make sure that children who were suffering from cancer had the best care and research that they could possibly get.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PINK

Hon. Liz Sandals: I am very pleased to stand in the House today to recognize International Day of Pink—which actually isn't today; it's on Wednesday this week, on April 13.

As we all know, a safe, inclusive and accepting school environment is essential for students to succeed in the

classroom and beyond. That is why this Wednesday, thousands of students and educators across Ontario, Canada and around the world will be recognizing International Day of Pink.

As most members of the Legislature are likely aware, International Day of Pink was started in 2007 by two high school students from Nova Scotia, David Shepherd and Travis Price. When they discovered that a classmate had been bullied for wearing a pink shirt to school, they decided to take action. They bought pink shirts and handed them out to some of their fellow students to wear to school. Before the end of the week, hundreds of students arrived at school wearing pink shirts, in an overwhelming sign of solidarity and support for their bullied classmate.

I'm providing my support to International Day of Pink and showing my solidarity today by making the statement that bullying is unacceptable, period. Bullying can be physical, verbal, social or electronic. It can be based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, race, age, appearance, disability or any other factor that may set someone apart from others. Any form of bullying, for any reason, is unacceptable in our schools. International Day of Pink acts as a worldwide annual event for people to speak out against bullying.

Our government fully embraces International Day of Pink and its message of bullying prevention and awareness. Our government is taking action on bullying in a number of ways. We developed anti-bullying legislation, specifically the Accepting Schools Act. This act, which passed in 2012, was the first legislation of its kind in Canada. This important piece of legislation is helping to make every school in Ontario a safe, inclusive and accepting place to learn.

Last year, our government took further steps towards ending bullying and promoting well-being, by releasing the revised and up-to-date health and physical education curriculum. This research-based curriculum helps our young people build skills for healthy relationships that will help prevent bullying, including cyberbullying, and harassment. In cases where this is happening, our curriculum will better prepare students to actively and safely respond, or get help in cases where it is needed.

Our health and phys-ed curriculum helps children and youth develop the skills they need for online safety by learning about safe and respectful use of technology and also to understand the social, emotional and legal implications of online behaviours such as sexting.

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Many schools and school communities are already demonstrating leadership in fostering and maintaining positive school climates. For the last five years, a number of school communities in Ontario have been recognized for their efforts through the Premier's Awards for Accepting Schools. These awards celebrate the innovative work that the safe and accepting school teams do in promoting a positive school environment and supporting student achievement and well-being.

Speaker, we're also working collaboratively to establish a Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, where

our school communities are given a platform to raise awareness of bullying-related issues with parents and their local communities. I should also note that our strong, ongoing partnership with Kids Help Phone gives young Ontarians access to telephone and Web-based professional counselling services 24 hours a day, every day.

Promoting well-being is also a key fundamental goal of achieving excellence—our renewed vision for education in Ontario. That vision will help to create learning environments that support the cognitive, emotional, social and physical development of our children and students. We know that bullying, harassment and discrimination have an immediate, negative impact on the well-being of our children and youth and their ability to succeed in school.

That is why the International Day of Pink is so important. This day is a reminder that everyone has a part to play in creating a positive school climate. So I encourage every member in the House to wear pink this Wednesday in recognition of the International Day of Pink and to continue to promote the success and well-being of all Ontario students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is time for responses.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of my leader, Patrick Brown, and the entire PC caucus to recognize this coming Wednesday, April 13, as International Day of Pink.

Last year, 9.4 million Canadians wore pink as part of International Day of Pink, and I hope that we will surpass that number this coming Wednesday. I'm proud that schools across Dufferin-Caledon in my riding will be participating in International Day of Pink.

Most of us know the story of how Day of Pink began, nine years ago, when two students in a Nova Scotia school stood up for a classmate who was being bullied simply because he chose to wear pink. These students organized a campaign to have their classmates wear pink in solidarity with their fellow schoolmate and against bullying. Now, every year, on the second Wednesday of April, individuals come together and wear pink to stand up against homophobia, transphobia and all other forms of bullying.

As we know, bullying, no matter in what form it is or who it targets, is wrong. Unfortunately, many are targeted and attacked because of who they are. Nearly half of parents in Canada report having a child being bullied, and one in three adolescent students in Canada report being bullied recently. Not only does bullying happen in schools, but it also occurs in workplaces, with 40% of Canadian workers experiencing bullying on a weekly basis. With the advent of social media—smartphones and tablets—these attacks, unfortunately, can happen anywhere at any time. Whether it is because of someone's ethnicity, skin colour, religion, weight, appearance, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, it's never okay.

We should be proud of what we have accomplished here in this Legislature, but there's still work to be done. I would like to specifically call out my former colleague Elizabeth Witmer for raising this issue many years ago as an MPP, and my colleague from Nepean-Carleton as well. Both have brought forward private members' bills to try to end bullying in our schools.

We must continue working on building a culture, not just in our schools but in the entire province, that celebrates diversity in all its forms and that includes Ontarians from every corner of the province, in every community and on every block.

We need to continue standing up for those who are attacked for who they are. That is what International Day of Pink is about: a time for all of us to put differences aside and come together to recognize that it's okay to be different, it's okay to be who you are, and that bullying in any form is unacceptable.

On Wednesday, April 13, I hope you will wear pink on International Day of Pink to show that it's never okay.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise on behalf of the New Democratic caucus and speak to the International Day of Pink this year. By standing up to bullying and discrimination today, we are working towards a more accepting Ontario tomorrow.

The support and popularity of the Day of Pink, which takes place on April 13 this year, speaks volumes to its success and the hard work of organizers, activists and communities across the province. I want to thank everyone who has organized an event this week for all of their efforts. Organizations like Jer's Vision, Egale, Queer Ontario and the Trans Lobby Group are leaders in the fight against homophobia, sexism, racism, transphobia and discrimination in all of its forms.

The fight against bullying and discrimination is no easy task and there is not just one target. Indeed, it is an effort to change what is accepted in society, rather than expecting someone to fit into socially constructed norms. We must challenge anything and everything that asks us to change who we are to appease others' expectations of us. This cannot be more true than when we are talking about Ontarians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer.

To this day, discriminatory practices remain in this province. While heterosexual couples don't have to ask to be recognized as parents, queer parents are expected to adopt their own children. Yes, Speaker, right now, if a lesbian couple uses a sperm donor whose identity they know, the partner of the woman giving birth isn't automatically considered a parent. Instead, after the child is born, a court date is obtained, independent legal advice is sought for the donor, and the non-birth mother chooses whether to adopt her own child or ask the court to declare that she is a parent.

The entire process for second-parent adoptions and declarations of parentage typically takes several months after a child's birth. In that time, families are not properly recognized under the law, which can impact health care decisions, the ability to travel internationally with the

child, as well as the family's sense of security. In the unthinkable and unfortunate event that the birth mother experiences complications in childbirth, there is no guarantee that the children's other mother will be legally recognized in a parental capacity.

I'm proud to say that New Democrats are at the forefront of the fight for equality of parental recognition in this province. My colleague from Parkdale–High Park, whose work in this area is a testament to her dedication as an activist and as a legislator, has tabled Bill 137, *Cy and Ruby's Act (Parental Recognition)*, 2015. This legislation would eliminate the distinction between the person who gives birth and the child's other parent.

This legislation also makes sure that lesbian co-mothers who use donor sperm would be able to include both mothers' information on the child's birth registration form and allows for the recognition of an additional parent, such as a known sperm donor.

Finally, the legislation removes all gendered language from birth registration forms. Trans men who give birth will no longer be forced to identify as "mother," which is discriminatory and denies their lived reality.

While this legislation passed second reading, it has yet to be called to committee and enacted into legislation. The government's response to parental recognition must be more than lukewarm. Each day the government stalls in calling this important legislation to committee is another day of discrimination and uncertainty for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer parents. LGBTQ parents should not be forced to take this government to court for action on this issue. Equal access to parental recognition must be a priority.

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PETITIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the current government under Premier Kathleen Wynne is calling for the sale of up to 60% of Hydro One shares into private ownership; and

"Whereas the decision to sell the public utility was made without any public input and the deal will continue to be done in complete secrecy; and

"Whereas the loss of majority ownership in Hydro One will force ratepayers to accept whatever changes the new owners decide, such as higher rates; and

"Whereas electricity rates are already sky-high and hurting family budgets as well as businesses; and

"Whereas ratepayers will never again have independent investigations of consumer complaints, such as the Ontario Ombudsman's damning report on failed billing; and

"Whereas the people of Ontario are the true owners of Hydro One and they do not believe the fire sale of Hydro One is in their best interest;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To protect Ontario ratepayers by stopping the sale of Hydro One."

I fully support it, will sign my name and send it with page Jack.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have petitions from Fiona Cassels in Stittsville: "Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this, affix my name to it and send it with page Jerry.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here with hundreds of names that have been collected very quickly and initiated by Nadine Blum and Kelly Doctor, who are here in the east gallery.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many parents and caregivers are being charged non-refundable fees to place their children on wait-lists for daycare centres;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees can range from tens to hundreds of dollars;

"Whereas due to the scarcity of quality daycare spaces, many parents and caregivers are forced to place their children on multiple wait-lists;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care;

"Whereas daycare wait-lists are often administered in a non-transparent manner which creates the risk that they will be administered in an unfair and/or discriminatory manner;

"Whereas parents and caregivers in Ontario already face significant barriers accessing daycare due to high costs and limited numbers of daycare spaces;

"Whereas quality child care is a public good and not a commodity and the costs of child care should not operate on a supply-and-demand basis;

"Whereas there are currently no regulations in place to prevent daycares from charging parents and caregivers exploitative fees;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that we have a responsibility to take action now, and support a requirement for transparent administration of daycare wait-lists and a ban on non-refundable daycare wait-list fees."

I completely support this petition, endorse it and send it down to the table with Deanna.

PROMPT PAYMENT

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas delayed payments are a harmful practice in Ontario's construction industry;

"Whereas Ontario's trade contractors incur significant costs when payments are delayed from general contractors;

"Whereas cash flow risks have forced many contractors out of business and discouraged others from investing in capital or hiring new workers;

"Whereas payment delays have led trade contractors to hiring fewer apprentices, which will lead to fewer qualified tradespeople in the future;

"Whereas prompt payment legislation offers government the opportunity to provide stimulus to the economy without spending a dime;

"We, the undersigned, call on the Ontario Legislature to support Ontario's construction industry by adopting prompt payment legislation as a means to address the payment delay issues in Ontario."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and send it with Jerry.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Catherine Fife: These petitions were given to me by Professor Janet McLaughlin in Waterloo. It's entitled

"Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this ... government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Diluk.

CAREGIVERS

AIDANTS NATURELS

Mr. John Fraser: I have a family caregivers petition, une pétition des aidants naturels.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

"Whereas there are over 2.6 million caregivers to a family member, a friend or a neighbour in Ontario;

"Attendu qu'il y a plus de 2,6 millions d'aidants naturels qui soutiennent un membre de leur famille, un ami, ou un voisin en Ontario;

"Whereas these caregivers work hard to provide care to those that are most in need even though their efforts are often overlooked;

"Attendu que ces aidants naturels travaillent sans cesse afin de fournir des soins à ceux qui en ont le plus besoin, même si leurs efforts sont souvent ignorés;

"Whereas one third of informal caregivers are distressed, which is twice as many as four years ago;

"Attendu qu'un tiers des aidants naturels sont en difficulté, le double d'il y a quatre ans;

"Whereas without these caregivers, the health care system and patients would greatly suffer in Ontario;

“Attendu que sans ces aidants naturels, le système de soins de santé et les patients de l’Ontario souffriraient énormément;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support MPP Gélinas’s bill to proclaim the first Tuesday of every April as Family Caregiver Day to increase recognition and awareness of family caregivers in Ontario;

“Donc, nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario d’appuyer le projet de loi de la députée Gélinas pour déclarer le premier mardi d’avril comme la Journée des aidants naturels afin de sensibiliser les Ontariens à leur importante contribution.”

I’m affixing my signature.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a health care petition signed by hundreds of constituents from Parry Sound–Muskoka, and it reads:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I sign this and support this petition.

1340

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Mr. Peter Sullivan from Chelmsford, in my riding, for sending those petitions in time. It goes as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline”—gasoline is 94 cents in Sudbury and 74 cents 50 kilometres down the road—“and;

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of

price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Sohan to bring it to the Clerk.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition here that’s entitled “Supporting Transparency of Wait-Lists and the Banning of Non-Refundable Daycare Wait-List Fees in Ontario,” and it is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many parents and caregivers are being charged non-refundable fees to place their children on wait-lists for daycare centres;

“Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees can range from tens to hundreds of dollars;

“Whereas due to the scarcity of quality daycare spaces, many parents and caregivers are forced to place their children on multiple wait-lists;

“Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care;

“Whereas daycare wait-lists are often administered in a non-transparent manner which creates the risk that they will be administered in an unfair and/or discriminatory manner;

“Whereas parents and caregivers in Ontario already face significant barriers accessing daycare due to high costs and limited numbers of daycare spaces;

“Whereas quality child care is a public good and not a commodity and the costs of child care should not operate on a supply-and-demand basis;

“Whereas there are currently no regulations in place to prevent daycares from charging parents and caregivers exploitative fees;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that we have a responsibility to take action now, and support a requirement for transparent administration of daycare wait-lists and a ban on non-refundable daycare wait-list fees.”

Mr. Speaker, I agree with this petition, will affix my name and send it to the table with page Harry.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sorry to hear of your current dilemma that you're facing at home.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government's proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) is a mandatory pension plan which would target small businesses and their employees; and

"Whereas there has been little to no discussion on what the costs would be, or who would pay them; and

"Whereas affected businesses would be hit with up to \$1,643 per employee, per year in new payroll taxes starting in 2017; and

"Whereas affected employees would have up to \$1,643 per year extra deducted from their paycheques, and it would take 40 years for them to see the full pension benefits; and

"Whereas the Canadian Federation of Independent Business predicts the unemployment rate in Ontario would rise by 0.5%, and there would be a reduction in wages over the longer term; and

"Whereas all of these costs would be shouldered exclusively by small businesses and their employees; and

"Whereas public sector and big business employees who already have a pension plan will not be asked to pay into the plan;

"We, the undersigned, do not support implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and petition the government of Ontario to axe the pension tax."

I fully support it, will affix my name and send it with my page buddy Jack again.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I'd like to thank Cindy Thompson from the city of Ottawa for doing all the hard work in putting these petitions together.

It reads as follows:

"Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I couldn't agree with this more. I'm going to put my name on it and give it to page Chandise to bring to the Clerk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, that concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Government order G181.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Northumberland—Quinte West, my parliamentary assistant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I wish to remind the minister that he needs to move second reading of the bill to initiate the debate.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, forgive me. I'm new at this. I've only been here 15 years, right?

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Mr. McMeekin moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the minister to lead off the debate.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to make that exciting announcement again that I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, who will enlighten us shortly. Before I turn the floor over to him—my parliamentary assistant—I'm pleased to discuss the proposed Municipal Elections Modernization Act, known affectionately as Bill 181.

It was just last week that I was joined by my parliamentary assistant, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West, and the Deputy Premier and the Asso-

ciate Minister of Finance to announce the important changes we are proposing to municipal elections in Ontario. Our proposals, if passed, would help ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are clear and reflect the real and evolving needs of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, municipalities really are the governments closest to the people, as you know. We saw that last week up in Morriston. They provide front-line services like public transportation and recreation facilities. They deal with local issues like fixing roads and collecting property taxes. Our communities need to be strong and vibrant places where people can live, work and raise families. Good municipal government is what turns cities and towns into communities, and streets into neighbourhoods. For this reason, we want to help make sure the rules governing municipal elections are clear and simple and that they capture how modern campaigns and elections should be run.

At a time when voter turnout in many communities is going down, it's time to look at ideas that might help us reverse this trend. Many seem to agree with me. The reforms we're presenting also reflect the significant input we received from municipalities, community groups and the public at large.

Over the past year, we've had a number of conversations with Ontarians about municipal elections. As you know, the Municipal Elections Act is reviewed immediately following each municipal election to see if we can make some improvements. During the review, we asked how we could make local elections work better while keeping them fair, and Ontarians responded. I'm pleased to inform the House that we received more than 3,400 submissions. We heard many perspectives, including on the subject of ranked ballot voting.

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Mr. Speaker, if this bill passes, Ontario will become the only jurisdiction in Canada to currently provide municipalities and voters with an alternative to the first-past-the-post voting system.

I'm pleased that we are joined here today by Dave Meslin from Unlock Democracy, and Katherine Skene and the good people from the Ranked Ballot Initiative of Toronto, who have all been powerful advocates for this type of reform.

Proponents of ranked ballots believe this method of voting can make election campaigns more civil. I agree with this outlook. Jurisdictions that are using ranked ballots around the world have noticed better engagement, better and more civil debate, and higher voter turnouts. Those are three things I think we'd aspire to here in Ontario.

I believe candidates would have a vested interest in working better together, possibly reducing negative campaigning. I think we could all agree that's very much what our communities deserve: elected officials who are committed to working together to serve their communities better and debating issues of substance that are important, rather than engaging in personal attacks.

It will be up to municipalities to decide whether to embrace ranked ballots. I know several municipalities that we have met with have advocated for them.

The member from Northumberland–Quinte West will speak further about what we heard on ranked ballots shortly.

Speaker, we are also proposing changes around campaign financing and third-party engagement with additional accountability measures, because we also heard about the need to ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are transparent, accountable and flexible enough to ensure local choice.

We hope to increase transparency in municipal elections, so we are proposing a framework to regulate third-party advertising in order to increase accountability for advertisers and ensure more fair and transparent support. This would include setting contribution and spending limits. Only contributors who are eligible under the act could register as a third party. Third parties would also have to identify themselves on signs and advertisements. Candidates would not be able to direct a third-party advertiser on where they should focus their efforts or what their advertisements should say.

We are also proposing changes to the campaign finance rules that ensure the rules are not only transparent but consistent with accountable, fair and modern election finance practices. Corporations and unions could not register to be third-party advertisers or make contributions to third-party advertisers in municipalities where there is a bylaw banning these contributions. It's important.

Furthermore, I believe that any discussion about modern elections must include the option to ban corporate and union donations. Where have I heard that before? It's important that our cities and towns undertake this important conversation with their citizens. I applaud groups that have fostered that conversation—groups like Campaign Fairness, who have also joined us today. I was pleased to speak at their reception here at Queen's Park last Wednesday, and I was pleased to hear their perspective on the importance of this legislation. Here, in part, is what they said to us:

"The Liberal government gave us the Greenbelt Act and Places to Grow legislation and the Lake Simcoe Protection Act, but politicians and developers found ways to get around that legislation.

"Now you've proposed Bill 181....

"Your timing could not be more perfect....

"[While] nobody can be certain that the MEA modernization act will suddenly change the political landscape or protect southern Ontario's physical landscape ... it goes a long way to ensuring that combatants fight on a level playing field and restores respect for the political system. Nobody can ask for more than that. Today you've done something truly important ... and we thank you." I thank you for those comments.

Our proposed changes would help voters, candidates and contributors alike to better understand the election rules. In fact, the changes aim to encourage greater

compliance with these rules. For instance, one proposed change is to refund nomination fees to candidates only if they file their financial statement by the deadline. In this way, candidates would be encouraged to file on time.

We also heard during the consultation that Ontario's municipal elections are just too darned long. Ontario currently has the longest nomination period of any province in Canada. This contributes to campaign fatigue among candidates and voters—January 1 to whenever, with the 800 community meetings in Toronto that Mayor Tory told me about.

Based on what we heard, we are proposing to shorten the municipal election campaign period by 120 days. Candidates would be able to register between May 1 and the fourth Friday in July, instead of January 1 to the second Friday in September, in the year of the municipal election. Shortening the length of the nomination period would give municipalities more time to prepare ahead of the election, should they choose to use ranked ballots.

We also want to help make elections more accessible for everybody. Our proposed changes would require clerks to prepare accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could affect voters and candidates with disabilities. Municipalities would need to make the plan available to the public prior to voting day, so they would be informed.

Lastly, we are proposing improvements to the voters list. We will continue to work to make it easier for voters to add their name to the list or make changes to their information, as well as to make it easier for clerks to remove the names of deceased electors—who, from time to time, show up to vote—from the list. In addition to these shorter-term solutions, we will be working with stakeholders and a stakeholder working group to identify systematic issues with the voters list. We will, of course, continue to develop ways to help ensure a more accurate voters list over the long term.

Today I am proposing a package of reforms that respond to the changing needs of our communities. By increasing the transparency of municipal elections and promoting local choice, the proposed reforms represent a big step forward for local democracy, and they reflect what Ontarians say they want to see.

I want to thank everyone who spoke to us about how to make municipal elections more modern and how to make Ontario municipal elections better. Thank you to the good people of the Ranked Ballot Initiative, Unlock Democracy, and Campaign Fairness for their outlook and for their support.

I'll just close with a story my mother used to share with me when I was growing up. I didn't understand it until I was in my mid-twenties. She said, "Teddy, anybody can slay a dragon, but it's the people who get up every single day and try to love the world all over again who are the real heroes." These folk are my real heroes. Thank you for what you've done.

Speaker, needless to say, I urge all members to vote for the passing of this bill. With that, things get far more

exciting as I turn things over to my parliamentary assistant for some wise words.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, let me welcome the folks in the members' gallery: the Unlock Democracy folks, and the Ranked Ballot Initiative and Campaign Fairness people. This is truly democracy at work, and we thank them, as the minister did, for all their input. We're not quite done yet, but I'm sure we will get there.

1400

I want to thank Minister McMeekin for giving me the opportunity to speak today. This is very important, especially having spent some 12 years in the municipal sector before coming to this place back in 2003. It gives me some insight on some of the challenges.

Over the past year, I have had the pleasure of working alongside Minister McMeekin on the review of the Municipal Elections Act. In fact, I joined him in launching the review at the Centre for Social Innovation right here in Toronto just a few months back.

In my years of working at Queen's Park and back home in the riding of Northumberland—Quinte West, I've come to understand first-hand the need to have a voice in local issues and in the local democratic process. As you heard from the minister, we heard from many people and groups since last summer on how we can strengthen and support our communities by working to improve how our municipal elections are run.

As part of my responsibilities as parliamentary assistant, the Premier gave me the mandate to strengthen municipal governance through the Municipal Elections Act review. I was tasked with helping to ensure that the act continues to meet the needs of communities, including providing municipalities with the option of using ranked ballots as an alternative to first-past-the-post. As Minister McMeekin mentioned, there is a lot of interest in the ranked ballot. Frankly, it even surprised me. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this type of ballot will allow a voter to rank candidates in order of preference. No Canadian municipality currently uses the ranked ballot, but many jurisdictions around the world do, including Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Supporters of ranked ballots say that they have the potential to give voters a greater say in who is elected, can increase voter turnout and may result in elected officials who better reflect the diversity of their communities. Most of the public input that we received favoured allowing municipalities the option of using ranked ballots for future municipal elections.

During a review of the act, we heard feedback on several matters related to ranked ballots, such as the need to consult the public before a municipality decides to implement ranked ballots, how voters in a ranked ballot election will be counted, which offices would be elected using the ranked ballots and whether it should apply to all members of council and, of course, establishing a deadline for new rules to be in place so that municipalities have enough time to prepare for the upcoming 2018

municipal elections. Although that sounds far away, it really isn't.

The legislation we are proposing today will provide the authority to address these matters. In giving municipalities the option to use ranked ballots, we are allowing for more choices at the local level as to how municipal leaders are elected. Because every community is unique, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't always work. The option to use ranked ballots, along with other proposed changes that Minister McMeekin indicated earlier on, will enable us to take a big step forward in making our municipal elections more modern and transparent.

I join Minister McMeekin in support of Bill 181, and I urge all members to vote on passing this bill. It's long overdue, and I look for everyone's support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am pleased to rise to offer my comments on Bill 181.

Speaker, I've been in this place for just over four years, and in talking to my municipalities, talking to the ordinary people in my municipalities, I haven't really heard a lot of them asking for this type of thing on ranked balloting. It comes up every once in a while; usually around municipal election time is when it comes up. But it really isn't high on their list. I think if the government would pay more attention to things that really matter, at least to the citizens of my riding, certainly about their health care cuts and issues like this—that is something that they should be working a lot harder on than this bill.

I think there are a whole bunch of things in this bill that the government is trying to accomplish. I wonder if there are just too many things that they're trying to do all at once without concentrating on something that may be in this bill that's really important to the municipalities.

I think that if the government was really listening to my constituents in the riding of Perth-Wellington, they would be talking about cuts to seniors' health care, for instance. The drug plan is one that has certainly gotten constituents in my riding all worked up. Like I said, this type of thing doesn't really come up—usually just around municipal election time—and it's only a few people who talk about ranked balloting.

I think the importance of doing this isn't as important as this government thinks. It's probably a deflection, trying to deflect some of the criticism they've been receiving in the last number of weeks since the budget was produced and since health care has been cut across this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to both the minister and his parliamentary assistant when they focused mainly on the part of the bill that has to do with ranked ballot elections. I must tell you, Speaker, that I've been a politician for eight and a half years and I had never heard of this issue. I did not even know what it meant. I work in Toronto now, and I attended an event where some people were very passionate about why this

needed to be brought forward. But to say that this is an issue that we hear a lot—I have never heard about it. Now I do.

But the bill does not only talk about ranked ballots. The bill is quite encompassing. This is a 59-page bill, and it goes through:

—a change to the election calendar: It used to be that you had to put your name on between January 1 and September; now, it will be May 1 and July;

—eligibility for who can run for office: You will have to have 25 people who support you if you want to put your name forward;

—eligibility of who can vote: This is an issue that I hear lots in my riding as to who is considered a tenant and who is not;

—ranked ballot election, which is what the government chose to focus on;

—advertising by candidates during an election campaign; and

—advertising by third parties during an election campaign.

It goes on to talk about campaign contributions to candidates, contributions to registered third parties, campaign expenses of candidates and of third parties, financial statements of candidates and registered third parties, administration of elections, and the list goes on.

There may be some good ideas in there. It will require a bit of time to go through.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today to talk about Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

As one of my colleagues mentioned earlier, making these changes is really long overdue. After every municipal election, we do some consultations. We try to find out what is working and what is not. It's important for governments to review the process.

After taking a review and holding consultations across the province, over 3,400 submissions were filed. These were submissions from everyone, whether they were municipalities, individuals or groups. People wanted to have their voices heard when it came to the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

Here's what they told us: They told us that they wanted to see some changes when it came to ranked ballots, when it came to campaign financing, when it came to the campaign period, when it came to accessibility and when it came to the voters list.

Why? Because, yes, Ontario is changing. We are growing, and our electorate and the residents in this province and their needs are also changing.

1410

As a result of this and in answer to some of these requests, we have come up with some suggestions with this bill, Bill 181; for example, ranked ballots. At a time when voter turnout is going down in many communities, it's time to look at ideas that can reverse the trend. We're proposing providing municipalities with the option to

introduce ranked ballot voting in their communities if they choose so.

Also, campaign finances: To increase transparency in municipal elections—as we know, we are hearing a lot about this when it comes to elections right now—we’re proposing a framework to regulate third-party advertising and to increase accountability for advertisers. This is something that we often hear people in the public discuss. I believe that any discussion about modern elections must include a discussion about whether to ban corporate and union donations.

In addition, campaign periods: The largest nomination period of any province can lead to voter fatigue and also candidate fatigue. I think this is an important exercise and an important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I’m pleased to have a moment to give some comments on the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing’s and the member from Northumberland–Quinte West’s speeches on Bill 181, which is dealing with changes to the Municipal Act, particularly giving municipalities the option of having ranked ballots. I have no problem with that idea. Certainly, it’s the way most MPPs get elected at nomination meetings. It’s often a system used for electing leaders as well, where the person running has to get at least 50% of the vote. Typically, you would number the ballot and, for the person who gets the fewest votes, their second choices are reassigned.

It’s a system that has been used in Australia for the municipal, lower House and upper House since 1918, I believe. I personally don’t have a problem with that. I agree with the minister that it probably would mean that candidates would have to work together so they don’t upset the voters who might support another candidate who would be assigning another choice to them.

The part of the bill that I think really needs to be dealt with on a provincial basis is the third-party advertising section because, here in Ontario, it’s the Wild West for third-party advertising, particularly in provincial elections. We have groups like the Working Families Coalition spending as much as political parties have spent; they spend millions and millions of dollars. Their main goal is to defeat Progressive Conservative candidates, and they’ve been fairly effective at it, I’d say, in the last three years. Frankly, it’s just not fair and it’s not a level playing field.

That’s an issue that this government needs to deal with. They’re talking about it for municipal elections in this bill, but it’s something that absolutely needs to be addressed for provincial elections.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continued debate. I was glad to have a couple of minutes to add comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That’s four questions and comments. One of the government members can reply. It has to be either the minister or the parliamentary assistant.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The final two minutes?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes, to respond.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to respond.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member from Perth–Wellington, the member from Nickel Belt, the member from Halton and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Let me start with Parry Sound–Muskoka. I think there are some things that need to change provincially, but I’m the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Those changes will have to be facilitated by the Legislative Assembly as a whole.

To the member for Perth–Wellington, who suggested that it’s just too much, too fast: I guess if I’m going to be criticized for anything, I’d love to be criticized for trying to do too much. We’re often accused of doing too little around here, so too much is good. Local governments: He questioned whether this is an issue. Local governments really need to listen, I would argue, to those who spoke up during the consultation, the 3,400 persons who very passionately embraced the ranked ballot concept.

The member from Nickel Belt knows that every party uses the ranked ballot in leadership races. She also talked about how lengthy the bill was: 60 pages. That makes sense because the member from Perth–Wellington said that we were trying to do too much. If you’re going to do too much, you have to be comprehensive about it, so we did that.

We listened to voices. The voices spoke pretty clearly, and the bill before us is a reflection of that. The House, in its infinite wisdom or folly, will have to choose which way it wants to go.

But I would just end with this: It’s clear that some people who are cynical and hold nothing sacred need something to believe in. Our job is to try to enhance that believability as best we can. I think Bill 181 is an honest effort to do that and reflects what we heard from the body politic out in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I’m pleased to rise to speak to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I want to start by thanking all the people, organizations and municipalities that shared their thoughts on the Municipal Elections Act review with me and my office. We appreciated everyone who took the time to talk with us and send emails and share copies of their submissions. I also want to thank the ministry for providing the briefing last week.

Municipalities are a responsible level of government. They need a Municipal Elections Act that allows them to hold modern elections in a way that suits their circumstances. We look forward to continuing to work with them as we move forward, to ensure that municipalities, officials and candidates have what they need to run modern, accessible, democratic and effective municipal elections.

I want to acknowledge that there are some positive things in this bill, but there is one single issue that will determine our vote: We cannot support a bill that takes democracy away by allowing a government to change the way they are elected without the requirement to consult the people.

I know there are a number of people here today because of their belief in the democratic system. Many of them are here because they believe that the ranked ballot system is more democratic. I'm pleased to see they are here, because I want to ask them for their support to make this bill even more democratic. I want to ask their support to ensure that the people have a say in the change of their electoral system.

The election doesn't belong to this government or even the members of the municipal council. It belongs to the people who vote in it, the people who come out every four years to choose the person who represents their values and supports their issues. These people need to have their voice heard if there is to be a change in the system by which their municipal government is elected.

There is a greater responsibility when it comes to changing the electoral system, one that requires that we consult the people not just in a few meetings but in a systematic and measurable way, one which requires that we take the time and make the effort to ensure that if there is change, it is one that is endorsed by the people. As the city of Owen Sound said in their submission, "Municipal elections are the democratic cornerstone of local government."

Already the provincial government had decided that the two choices municipal councils and the people who vote for them will have are first-past-the-post or ranked ballots. The government may have done some consultation on how to implement ranked ballots, but they didn't do any consultation on whether it was the best way or whether there's another system that would be even more democratic.

When this government was first elected, they created a citizens' assembly to examine all the possible electoral options, but the decision that ranked ballots was the best of the options for municipalities seems to have been made behind closed doors, with no transparency. Now this government wants to allow the electoral system to be changed in municipalities with no consultation at all.

People deserve a referendum before voting on system change. That is true of every level of government. This government used to recognize that. In 2007, when they looked at changing our electoral system, they held a referendum. When they announced the referendum question, the minister responsible for democratic renewal said: "Our democracy belongs to its citizens, and it is the voters of this province that should decide how their representatives should be elected."

In fact, the Premier was quoted in the *Toronto Star* in 2014 as saying, "Remember, we're the party that brought forward the idea of changing the electoral system in Ontario. We had citizens' assemblies. We had a referendum on that issue."

But in this bill, there's no requirement for municipalities to hold a referendum or even to do any public consultation before changing the voting system. When the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing was criticized for this on Twitter, his response was, "Under Municipal Act any municipality can hold a referendum on any issue. Some may choose this route. So be it."

Democracy needs more protection than "So be it." That is why we will be putting forward an amendment to require a municipal referendum before a municipality changes their electoral system. This referendum could be a separate vote, or it could be done on the ballot as part of a municipal election. If the people of a municipality want ranked ballots, that will give them the opportunity to voice that.

1420

It may be that changing to a new electoral system would be more democratic, but we can't allow democracy to be ignored in an effort to change the system. Mr. Speaker, elections are about democracy and ensuring that all people have a say in the government that represents them. Changing the entire electoral system based on the views of only a small portion of that population not only shows disrespect for our democratic system; it is irresponsible.

As Aaron Wudrick of the *National Post* said in a recent article, "Historical precedent weighs heavily in favour of a referendum, as no government in modern Canadian history has attempted to implement it without one—and electoral reform referenda in Prince Edward Island (2005), British Columbia (2005 and 2009) and Ontario (2007) were all defeated. But not all electoral reform referenda pan out this way. In New Zealand, for example, a 1992 referendum on electoral reform not only won, but won big, with the pro-reform side winning 84% of the vote. Accordingly, reform advocates should not view a referendum as a death sentence for their cause, but as an opportunity to win new converts to the pro-reform side."

The *Toronto Star* agreed. In a January editorial, they said, "Referendums on voting change have already been held in three provinces, setting a precedent of sorts. All failed, and some reformers are so hell-bent on dumping first-past-the-post that they are urging the Liberals to be 'brave' and move ahead on their own hook. That makes no sense. The lesson of past referendums cannot be that the people are too blind or foolish to see the light; it must be that those who want change have to do a better job of persuasion."

If ranked ballots is the most democratic electoral system, the people will choose it, but it has to be their choice, not the government's choice.

For those at home who are not familiar with the ranked ballot system, perhaps we should explain how it works. Instead of just voting for a single candidate, a voter will rank the candidates in order of preference. The votes will be counted and the candidate with the least votes drops off. All ballots that had that candidate as their first choice are then distributed to the candidate that the

voters had ranked as their second choice. If no candidate has received over 50% of the vote, the lowest candidate once again drops off and their votes are redistributed to the next choice ranked on the ballot.

There are a lot of questions that aren't known about how ranked ballot elections would be implemented in Ontario. How many candidates could a voter rank? Are they required to rank all of them? This was the subject of a court challenge to the ranked ballot voting system in San Francisco, but the government is asking us to vote on this bill without knowing which model will be used here or whether it will be up to municipalities to decide.

There are many other questions. Do candidates have to receive certain percentages, say, beyond the first round? If so, how will it be tabulated?

After the repeal of ranked ballot voting in Aspen, Colorado, a report from the Colorado Secretary of State, elections division, stated: "Written comments demonstrated that depending on selection of any specific instant ranked voting tabulation algorithm, the same set of ballots could have resulted in multiple differing answers."

There are also questions about what the ballot will look like and how voters will be educated on how the system works. We don't even know whether these decisions will be made by municipalities or by the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, this bill doesn't answer any of these questions. What it says is:

"(2) The regulation may provide that a ranked ballot election is authorized for only specified offices on a municipal council."

The bill goes on to say that regulations may be created on:

"1. Ballots, voting procedures, the counting of votes and recounts.

"2. Powers that the clerk of the municipality may exercise in administering ranked ballot elections.

"3. Information to be made available to the public with respect to the counting of votes in each round."

That means that the province has the ability to make all of the decisions regarding the electoral system behind closed doors, with no public scrutiny and no transparency.

You will notice in that list I just read, Mr. Speaker, that there's nothing definitive in there about how it's going to work, just what needs to be done.

The government has said that they are hoping to have the regulations ready by spring. In fact, during our briefing on this bill, they said, "The intent is to have all the regulations in place as soon as possible after the bill is passed," so I'm going to ask them to release them before this bill goes to committee. Let's have the discussion about the ballots, voting procedures, the counting of votes and recounts. Let's ensure that municipalities who have experience with municipal elections can comment on these regulations when they come to the committee.

Mr. Speaker, there's another issue in this bill that I'm hoping to hear comments on at committee, and that is the changes to the recounts. Currently, the Municipal Elec-

tions Act states that a recount must be done in the same manner as the original count. The only exception to this is section 60, subsection (3), which states, "If the judge who orders a recount under section 58 is of the opinion that the manner in which the original count was conducted caused or contributed to the doubtful result, he or she may, in the order, provide that the recount shall be held in a different manner and specify the manner."

Under Bill 181, this subsection would not apply to ranked ballot elections. That means that if there's a problem with the way the original count was done, there's no ability to change that method of the recount. Perhaps this was done because ranked ballots can be more complicated and take longer to count, so counting done by hand in larger municipalities such as Toronto would be a challenge. I understand that reasoning, Mr. Speaker. However, I'm very concerned that this bill, as written, provides no avenue to recount if there's a technical problem.

We could have a situation where there's a glitch with the machine and you have fed in a thousand votes and only 10 register, and you would still have to do the recount using the machines. We need to look at a way to deal with that type of situation. We cannot sacrifice someone's democratic right to vote because it's easier, whether it is counting votes or determining the electoral system.

As our leader, the MPP from Simcoe North, said last week, "No government should rush through electoral reform without first putting it to the citizens to decide. The government of the day doesn't get to change the electoral system, given that they, themselves, are an interested party. I believe if you're going to change how we have elections ... a referendum is necessary."

Mr. Speaker, changing the method by which people are elected will change the results in some cases, so you cannot have the people who will be benefiting from the change making the decisions without consulting the people. It isn't democratic and it puts municipal councils in a situation where they are forced into a clear conflict of interest. Putting them in that situation isn't showing respect for democracy, municipalities or the voters.

As you know, a conflict of interest occurs when a politician is making a decision that could result in a benefit to them. It's a serious charge. In this case, making the decision to change to the ranked ballot could mean ensuring a municipal politician's re-election, which also means ensuring their salary. I don't believe that municipalities want the appearance and I don't think it's fair for the province to put them in that position. When the provincial government considered electoral reform, they held a referendum, as did other provinces. Municipalities are no less a responsible level of government.

The government would tell us that this is a change that municipalities want and the people of Toronto requested. In their submissions, Vaughan and Richmond Hill councils asked that public consultations be required before a ranked ballot could be implemented. The Toronto city council motion was even stronger. In October

2015, the city of Toronto council passed a motion which recommended “that the province should not proceed with amendments to the Municipal Elections Act to provide for ranked-choice voting.”

The motion went on to say “that if the province does amend the Municipal Elections Act to provide for ranked-choice voting;

“(a) the use of ranked-choice voting be optional for the city of Toronto; and

“(b) the city of Toronto only be permitted to implement ranked-choice voting after holding public consultations and a referendum....”

Let’s make sure everybody is very clear on what Toronto’s current city council said: They didn’t want the option of ranked ballots, but if the province proceeds with the changes anyway, there should be a requirement for a municipal referendum.

In the 2007 provincial referendum this government had set the support needed at 60% of the votes cast. They reported that it was the same level as the level used in referendums in Prince Edward Island and British Columbia. If we use the same threshold, then according to a recent poll by Mainstreet Research, there isn’t enough support for ranked ballots in Toronto to meet the threshold to win a referendum.

1430

Mr. Speaker, there are some people who have been very vocal about the fact that they believe municipal elections should use ranked ballots, but there are millions who haven’t spoken at all. There are 2.79 million people in the city of Toronto, and we’ve only heard from a small fraction of those people. On electoral reform, everyone should have the opportunity for input. There are a lot of people who don’t make it out to city hall or legislative committees to express their views, people who may not email their councillor or their MPP, but they show up every election to cast their ballot because it is their democratic right and they want a say in the future of their communities. We need to hear from those people.

There are a lot of people who came to this country because they valued our democracy. They studied to take the citizenship test so they could participate in Canada’s democracy. They are working hard to build a life here for their families. They value being able to come out and vote in a free election. Those people deserve a say before we change the electoral system.

As a recent editorial in the Caledon Citizen said, “If we’re going to have electoral reform that we can all live with and embrace, there’s going to have to be a faction that comes up with a workable idea and get it before the voters, through a referendum, complete with explanations as to how it would work, and promotion of the advantages. Opponents would be able to make their own case to the contrary.

“It could be argued that electoral reform is too important to leave up to government.”

The city of Toronto isn’t the only municipality that passed resolutions saying that they do not want ranked ballots. Last July, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and

Housing set out a document entitled “Ranked Ballots Would Give More Choice to Municipalities.” In response, a number of municipalities passed motions against ranked ballots, such as the one which stated, “The county of Grey does not support the proposed changes to the municipal electoral system which would provide the option of using ranked ballots during municipal elections.”

The town of Minto passed a resolution around the same time which read, “That the province be advised” that the “town of Minto not support a ranked ballot system for municipal elections in Ontario for the following reasons:

“(1) Issues of splitting the vote, negative campaigning or abandoning a race are generally not problems in rural Ontario;

“(2) ‘One candidate one vote’ councils elected in Ontario have built communities that are the envy of the world, with open, transparent and fair races with very few issues;

“(3) Ranked ballots will be confusing and will increase cost for training candidates, election officials and voters as well as require expense and unnecessary equipment;

“(4) Ranked ballots may encourage political parties to run slates of candidates to attempt to win as many first-, second- and third-place votes so that a party secures the office over an individual.”

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing consultation with municipal clerks and CAOs held in North Bay recommended that municipalities below a certain size not have the option to use ranked ballots. A number of other people have raised concerns about ranked ballots. Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson—and, Mr. Speaker, you will know who that is—a former Liberal cabinet minister, said it would “water down” people’s vote.

Hamilton’s manager of elections, Tony Fallis, said last year that if the city adopted a ranked ballot system it would cause “confusion” among electors.

The clerk of the city of Niagara Falls, Clerk Dean Iorfida, said:

“Ranked ballots may work in some jurisdictions but to me in municipal elections, where there is no party affiliation, the first-past-the-post system makes the most sense. With the ranked ballot system, you could have a competitive multi-candidate race where the person with the most first-place votes does not win the seat.”

In fact, according to a research paper from the Minnesota House of Representatives, in 1915 a form of ranked voting was deemed unconstitutional by the Minnesota Supreme Court because it had the effect of giving some voters the weight of more than one vote relative to the other voters in the same election. A judge in San Francisco recently made a similar comment when ruling on a challenge there.

It’s clear from these resolutions and comments that there isn’t universal support for ranked ballots. There may be some communities where people want them and

some where they don't. That's why we need to ensure that the people are consulted when municipalities are considering a change to the electoral system. A referendum is the only objective and fair way to ensure that the change is supported by the majority of the voters.

During the debate on the Electoral System Referendum Act, which was brought forward by this government, the minister responsible for democratic renewal said, "A decision to change electoral systems should not be taken lightly. Regular elections allowing citizens to choose who will represent them and govern are the foundation of our democracy, and so we have developed a referendum process so that Ontarians can make a choice on the future of the electoral system by which they elect members to this Legislature." I couldn't agree with her more.

Holding a referendum is protection for voters. Without that requirement, there's nothing to stop governments from changing the electoral system to benefit themselves and keep themselves in power. A government that receives more money from a particular group could decide that it's the only group allowed to donate. They could change the election date to a time when their supporters are more likely to come out and vote, or they could simply extend their term and put off the election. Elections do not belong to the government, at any level; they belong to the people who vote in them, and those people should get a say in how their democracy is run.

Other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world have recognized that. British Columbia has held two referendums, in 2005 and 2009, on the question of whether to change to a single transferable vote electoral system. That is a form of proportional representation in which each constituency elects a group of members based on the percentage of the votes received.

In 2005, Prince Edward Island rejected an electoral reform proposal, with 25 districts voting no in the referendum versus two that voted yes.

London, England, had a referendum in which the people supported the change to an alternative voting system to elect their Lord Mayor. However, in 2011, when the United Kingdom held a referendum on whether the people wanted to change the voting system, more than two thirds of the people voted no.

Often, in the debates about ranked ballots, people point to examples in American cities, where they generally refer to this electoral system as instant runoff voting. What people fail to mention when they cite these examples is that the referendum or ballot initiative on the proposal to change the electoral system was taken to the people before it was implemented. Every one of them had that. San Francisco implemented instant runoff voting in 2004, but only after it passed a ballot measure in March 2002 with 55% of the vote.

In 2004, the people of Berkeley, California, passed a ballot measure to change to instant runoff voting.

In November 2005, Takoma Park, Maryland, passed a referendum or advisory ballot on instant runoff voting before they used it to fill a by-election two years later.

In November 2007, the people of Aspen approved a charter amendment to implement instant runoff voting. After one election, concerns were raised, and the question was again put to the people in November 2010. They voted to repeal the instant runoff voting.

In 2005, 55% of the voters in Burlington, Vermont, voted to support instant runoff voting. Instant runoff voting was used in two elections. On the second election, the person who was in the lead after the first round and the second round ended up losing by 3%. Citizens gathered enough signatures to put the question to the voters on whether they wanted to revert to first-past-the-post. The organizer of the group said, "I was an early supporter of IRV ... But I've been disappointed in the way it has worked. I think it has proven itself to be a disservice to the voters. I think it's extremely convoluted and that voters don't understand how it works." The people of Burlington voted to go back to a first-past-the-post system.

In November 2006, the people of Oakland, California, approved a ballot measure that would require instant runoff or ranked ballot elections. Oakland is an interesting example of what can happen with ranked ballot elections. In the 2010 election, the candidate who was strongly in first place after the first ballot ended up losing with 49% of the vote. According to reports, after the first ballot, Jean Quan received just 24% of the first-place votes to her main opponent, Don Perata's, 35%. However, as the other candidates dropped off and their votes were redistributed, Quan ended up with 51% and won the election.

That example raises questions. Who is the more democratic choice, the person who was first choice by 35% of the people and second choice by an additional 14%, or the person who was first choice by 24% of the people, but second choice by 27% of the people? I think that's a question that only the voters have a right to decide.

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The Oakland examples raise questions because one report stated that 10% of the 97,940 people who voted in that election made mistakes that reflected fundamental misunderstanding of the ranked ballots. In a race that had only 2% apart, that is a high enough rate of error that it could have changed who became the mayor.

Despite what some critics say, these examples of referendums on electoral reforms show that there are many that are successful. The fact that some fail and some are successful demonstrates that they work.

Also, I want to show that no voting method is clear-cut. There are judgments on which system is more democratic. No government has a right to make those judgments; the right belongs to the people.

It's interesting that we often point to American examples of ranked ballots, and yet a study of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries found that—listen to this, Mr. Speaker—the United States actually has the lowest voter turnout of the 14 countries on that list. So ranked ballots, if that's where

they're doing it the most, are not bringing the people out to vote.

When someone tells me that they don't vote, very often the reason they give is that they don't feel that their vote counts. Does anything send that message to people more than changing the entire voting system without even giving the voters a say? In 2003, Elections Canada conducted a study on voter turnout and found that "people are less likely to cast a ballot if they feel they have no influence over government actions, do not feel voting is an essential civic act or do not feel the election is competitive enough to make their votes matter to the outcome, either at the national or the local constituency level."

If you want to encourage people to vote and participate in democracy, then we need to respect that democracy. Ontario and all of Canada have a number of groups that have formed with the goal of making our democratic system better, and I want to commend them for that. As I acknowledged earlier, there are some here in Queen's Park today because they believe that a ranked ballot is more democratic. It is one of the great things about our country that democracy belongs to the people and they can participate in it by coming here, speaking at committee hearings, talking to their representatives, signing petitions and, most importantly, voting.

As politicians, we need to respect that. As the group Defend Democracy stated, "Canada's electoral system is the basis of our democracy. Considering the potential impact, no one government or political party has the authority to fundamentally alter our democratic system. If our system is to be reformed, it is up to the people of Canada to decide directly through a referendum."

There will be those who criticize the idea of requiring a referendum as too much work or an unnecessary expense, but the reality is that municipalities are already consulting with their voters by putting referendum questions on the ballot. In the last municipal election, the city of Greater Sudbury had three referendum questions on the ballot regarding dates and times that their retail businesses should be allowed to be open. Based on results of those votes, Greater Sudbury voted to repeal existing bylaws relating to hours of retail establishments during the first meeting of the new term of city council on December 9, 2014.

Bill 181 makes changes to the timing of these ballot questions. The deadline will now be March 1 for municipalities to pass a bylaw to include a question on the ballot, and May 1 for the upper-tier municipalities, school boards or the minister to put the question on the ballot.

Mr. Speaker, I don't believe there's any reason that we should make it more difficult for municipalities to consult with their people. The government is now proposing that municipalities must have passed a bylaw to put a question on their ballot more than seven months before the election. It can't be because the clerk needs time to design the ballot, because the minister gets an additional two months before his deadline for putting questions on

that same ballot. Does the minister think that he is that much more important than municipalities? Or has he simply failed to look at the fact that municipalities are using these ballot referendum questions effectively to consult with their voters?

The Oshawa council was considering changes to their voting system, so they did the right thing and took the question to the people by putting a referendum question on the ballot in 2014. The question was whether to return to the ward voting system, instead of the city-wide voting. The people voted strongly for the ward system, reversing their decision from the previous referendum on the question. The Oshawa council recognized that it should be up to the people to determine how those representatives were elected. During that same municipal election, the city of Kingston put a referendum question on the ballot to ask whether people wanted a casino. It's ironic that this government believes in referendums on whether the people of a municipality want a casino, but not referendums on an issue as important as their municipal voting system.

In an interview when she was first elected, the member from Kingston said, "The question of whether there is a casino in Kingston should be left to the citizens of this community to decide. I applaud city council for holding a referendum on the casino issue and allowing Kingstonians to have their voice heard."

While the lack of public consultation required for changes to the electoral system is what will determine our vote on this bill, it is not the only change that this bill makes.

There are some aspects of this bill that are positive, but there are also some sections that are causing confusion and concern. One of those is the new requirement for municipal candidates to get 25 signatures in order to register. Some people have argued that that's too easy for people to register as a municipal candidate. They point to the Eglinton-Lawrence ward in Toronto, where the winning councillor received only 17% of the vote because there were 16 candidates on the ballot, splitting the vote. In fact, there were three candidates that received less than 100 votes.

While a requirement for signatures might help address this concern, the way this bill is written makes this requirement ineffective. The candidate is required to collect 25 signatures, each with a declaration that the person is an eligible voter in the municipality, not the ward specifically. So that means, in the case of the Eglinton-Lawrence ward, candidates simply had to get 25 signatures of people from anywhere in Toronto.

But the requirement is actually weaker than that. The way the act is written is, "The clerk is entitled to rely upon the information filed by the candidate...." Mr. Speaker, I've been a municipal candidate enough times to know that when you're bringing your nomination paper, the clerk verifies the signature with the voters list, and if it doesn't match, you have to get more signatures.

There also seems to be some confusion about the impact of this bill on donations from trade unions and

corporations. This may be of some interest to you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that some stakeholders have been given the impression that under this bill, those donations will be banned. Let's be clear: This bill will give municipalities the ability to pass a bylaw banning donations from trade unions or corporations.

I support giving municipalities more authority to make decisions. We know they are a responsible level of government. What I disagree with is people who try to describe this bill as doing more than it actually does. This bill only gives municipalities the option to prohibit those donations by passing a bylaw. It does not require it. If none of the municipalities choose to pass that bylaw, then the corporations will still be allowed to donate up to \$5,000 to candidates in each municipality, which means they could donate more than \$22 million across Ontario.

This bill also does not prohibit corporations and trade unions from third-party advertising unless the municipality passes a bylaw preventing these organizations from contributing to campaigns.

Most of the rules applied to third-party advertising look like they've been copied from the rules that apply to candidates and campaigns. For instance, the bill contains a strange loophole that allows someone who is not normally a resident to contribute to third-party advertising if their spouse is a registered third party.

Similar to the rules for the candidates, this bill allows contributions to third-party advertisers of \$25 or less, with no record of who was making the donation. For organized groups, especially organizations working across the province, this loophole may create an opportunity for misuse.

Copying the rules fails to recognize some of the significant differences between third-party advertisers and candidates. For example, if a candidate fails to file their financial documents after an election, they will now have 30 days in which to pay up, or pay a \$500 late filing fee, after which they could then be removed from office and not allowed to register for the next election.

For an individual with a career in politics, removal from office and not being allowed to run in the next election is a very significant penalty. In fact, it's so significant that when councillors applied to the courts, it was often overturned.

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When a Woolwich township councillor—and I expect you would know this one, Mr. Speaker—had been acclaimed, and appeared in court after the last election to appeal the punishment, the judge was actually apologizing to him for his being stuck in this position. Now, we have to look at it: He didn't actually run an election. He was acclaimed. But you still have to file your election return and he had missed the deadline. He got his seat back.

However, this bill applies the same rules to third-party advertising. It fails to recognize that if an organization isn't allowed to register as a third party because they failed to file their financial paperwork after the last election, the people behind it can simply create a new

organization. It's one of the areas that we should look at in committee to ensure that the restrictions on third-party advertising are effective, if they're going to be there.

But we need to ensure that there are controls on third-party advertising not just at the municipal level but at the provincial level. I think the minister spoke to that already. This came up in Municipal Elections Act review submissions. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association said that the discussions on third-party advertising should "consider, in a proportionate way, any provisions currently put in place with regard to the third-party advertising rules applicable for provincial and federal elections."

On Friday, our leader announced six steps that we want to see to clean up political fundraising in Ontario. That would include all three levels of government. One of those was to put legislative limits on political advertising by third parties. We believe that elections must be fair. Without legislative limits on political advertising by third parties, special-interest groups will continue to make a mockery of the system. In 2014, special interests purchased almost \$9 million in political advertising. Groups like Working Families spent millions to influence the outcome of the last few elections.

In his report following the election, Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer stated, "Of the jurisdictions in Canada that regulate third-party advertising, Ontario is the only one where third parties do not face advertising spending or contribution limits. The Chief Electoral Officer believes that this reality could very well produce a situation in which parties and candidates campaign on an uneven playing field."

"All other political entities in the electoral process are subject to spending and contribution limits as well as greater reporting and disclosure requirements. The rules related to third parties are not consistent with how all other political entities are treated and should be strengthened to promote greater transparency."

We called on the government to address this problem and they ignored it. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound put forward a bill called An Act to amend the Election Finances Act with respect to third party election advertising, which would have put limits on the third-party advertising. The government, of course, voted it down. Third-party spending limits have been promised at the provincial level before, and we're still waiting for real action. Now that this government has taken a step to put them in place for municipalities, we need to see them at the provincial level.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that there are some positives in the bill, such as addressing corporation and union donations, and I hope that the government will support our amendments to make this bill democratic so that we can support all of the other measures.

One of the other things that is a step in the right direction is shortening the campaign period. Instead of beginning on January 1, under this bill candidates will not be able to file their registration until May 1. While most people agree with shortening the campaign period,

there's been a lot of debate about what the right date is for it to start to ensure that new candidates have the opportunity to meet the voters and that all the candidates have the opportunity to fundraise.

Mr. Speaker, in provincial politics, riding associations have the ability to fundraise throughout the term. But in municipal politics, candidates cannot raise any money until they have registered. To address this, AMO proposed that candidates be allowed to begin fundraising as of January 2 but that the campaign begin on June 1. Instead, the government has set both dates as May 1. I look forward to hearing from municipalities, AMO and other organizations to see whether this is achieving the right balance.

While this bill shortens the campaign period by starting it later, it oddly makes a change that may result in the active campaign being longer. In the past, the cut-off for nominations was the second Friday in September. That meant that people could wait until Labour Day to register, and in some cases until then to finalize their decision to run. The government has moved that date to the fourth Friday in July. That means that instead of the final campaign period being six weeks, it will now be 13 weeks. That's two weeks longer than the last federal election campaign, which the Premier called unusual, unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer dollars.

While 13 weeks of advertisements, signs, debates and fundraising may be exhausting for the general public, it has a far bigger impact on municipal employees because they are required to take a leave of absence to run for municipal office. This means municipal employees who choose to run will now have to take 13 weeks away from their jobs. That's 13 weeks with no pay and, for the municipality, 13 weeks of scrambling to find someone to fill that position. That's going to convince some good people with municipal knowledge that it isn't worth the risk of running for office. And it doesn't just include people working in the township office; it includes all municipal employees, such as firefighters, municipal police, paramedics and many more.

Mr. Speaker, municipal employees need to take a leave of absence beginning in July, but their campaigning is limited because they can't get the candidates' voters list until September. Imagine the challenges that will be created for someone running for a school board who needs to identify the people who are voting for the school board they're running for.

While municipal employees previously had to take a leave of absence for a six-week campaign, the Municipal Elections Act was very clear that for this purpose volunteer firefighters were not municipal employees, which allowed them to continue to serve their community. The bill repeals that section. That means that people who are giving back to their community by serving as a volunteer firefighter are not allowed to volunteer during the 13 weeks of the writ.

Volunteer fire departments are in small communities where there isn't the tax base or the volume for a full-time professional department. In some of these municipi-

palities, preventing candidates from volunteering will leave the fire department short of people over those three months. But if their neighbour's house catches on fire, our volunteers are supposed to just watch because they aren't a firefighter during the three-month campaign. I just don't believe that's reasonable to expect. That doesn't make any sense.

Volunteer firefighters are people who believe in public service and giving back to their community. Aren't those the types of people we want to encourage to run for municipal council? Is this the first step towards preventing volunteer firefighters from volunteering while they are serving on council?

The lack of consultation with people regarding changes to the electoral system is not the only way this bill shows disrespect for democracy. Section 31 of the bill says: "If, in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council"—and we know that's the Premier's office with the cabinet around the table—"it is necessary or desirable in order to further the purposes of this section and this act, the regulation may vary the operation of any of the following provisions of this act or may provide that any of the following provisions do not apply with respect to a ranked ballot election." It tells you that they can do anything they want with the ranked ballots. This means that everything we are debating in this Legislature, everything that the public is commenting on in committee, everything we pass in clause-by-clause and in this Legislature can all be overruled by regulation behind closed doors.

Mr. Speaker, the bill lists 10 sections of the bill that can be overruled by regulation, from the rights of candidates and scrutineers to the counting of votes to court orders. Even worse is the final point under the section which allows regulation to overrule "such other provisions of this act as the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers appropriate." That means the government can overrule every single part of the Municipal Elections Act with regulations written behind closed doors. There's no requirement for them to consult with the Legislature, municipalities or the people who vote in municipal elections. That doesn't show respect for democracy, it doesn't show respect for the legislative process, and it definitely doesn't show respect for municipalities that took the time to put together submissions on changes needed and that will, given the opportunity, come to committee to tell us what other changes are needed.

We know that this bill is missing details around ranked ballots and the need for a referendum. Let's look at what else the municipalities requested that's not addressed in this bill.

A number of municipalities and organizations, including the city of Cambridge, suggested increasing the fee for candidates. This would help to ensure that the people running are serious candidates. In 2014, there were over 40 candidates for mayor of Toronto, and 22 of those candidates received less than 200 votes each.

Last summer, Joanne Chianello of the Ottawa Citizen wrote a column on the municipal election review, and in

it she criticized the limited time municipalities had to submit comments, given the importance of the topic. She also put forward some suggestions for municipal elections, including increasing the nomination fee. She said, "More than 120 people registered as ward candidates in the last election. Eight signed up to run for mayor. And while participation in the democratic process is a good thing, the low bar to entry—\$100 to run for council, \$200 for mayor—did invite many non-serious folks to join the race, adding to the noise of campaign and making it that much harder for some voters to focus on the issues." Under this bill, the nomination fee is now a personal expense, so any increase would have to be evaluated to ensure that it doesn't become a barrier to people running for office.

There are a couple of other issues that came up in the municipal elections review that are outside of the Municipal Elections Act. One of them was the timing of the new council to hold inaugural meetings, and I spoke to AMO about that—I'm sure the minister remembers. Numerous groups suggested that the lame-duck period was too long. AMO recommended that the municipalities be given the flexibility to hold the first meeting 18 to 39 days after the election so they would have the freedom to address local circumstances. I know that the government is still conducting municipal legislation review, and I encourage them to address that issue.

One of the other things that we heard after the last municipal election and throughout the Municipal Elections Act review was about the inaccuracy of the voters list. As the municipality of Huron-Kinloss said in their submission, "It has repeatedly been identified by staff and council that the accuracy of the voters list is the biggest challenge to municipal elections." In fact, MPAC's election information specialist, Syd Howes, told Hamilton township council that the accuracy of the list was decreasing. In the 2014 election, it was 7% less accurate than four years before. The town of Kawartha Lakes reported that staff made close to 11,000 changes to the list, or 16% of the electorate, where the elector was deceased or had an incorrect mailing address.

A number of municipal officials complained that the province's review of the Municipal Elections Act was too focused on ranked ballots when, in fact, the issue with the voters list was a much bigger problem for municipal elections. While there have been some steps towards improving the problems with the voters list in this bill, such as allowing the clerk to remove names without a hearing, I don't believe these changes have solved the problem. I hope that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has taken steps to address this problem and will share those with us. Otherwise, municipalities, once again, will be left to pay the price.

Another thing that municipalities and AMO asked for in this bill was the authority and responsibility for clerks. We support that. However, every time we add a new responsibility and new requirements to report publicly, we need to recognize that there's a cost to that. As the president of AMO, Gary McNamara, said during their

conference last summer, "New requirements come at us almost on a daily basis which can feel like death by a thousand cuts. It starts to add up." As we add new burdens, we need to review the existing ones to see which are no longer required. You need to look at what requirements are still written for a world where communication was done by registered mail.

In previous debates, I've repeatedly asked the minister to review the reporting requirements and remove one for each new burden that they are putting on municipalities. Since they have not taken that step yet, I have filed an order paper question asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for a list of the reporting requirements. I look forward to receiving it so that we can look at the cumulative burden.

For instance, the bill adds a requirement for clerks to review contributions to municipal campaigns to look for people who have donated more than the limit of \$750 per candidate or \$5,000 combined to all candidates in a municipality. That is a change that was requested. It will help to ensure that municipal elections are fair, but it also adds a significant burden on municipal clerks, and that costs time and money. We need to recognize that municipalities have limited resources, and the province continues to ask them to do more and more with less.

It has only been a week since the bill was introduced and even less since it was available on the legislative website. Many municipalities are still reviewing it and have not had time to have discussions at council. We look forward to hearing from them and stakeholder groups as we move forward.

Already we've seen that there are places where the act has addressed what these organizations requested, and there are places where the bill missed the mark. We're looking forward to this bill going to committee so we can put forward an amendment to require municipal referendums. We also look forward to it so that we can hear from municipalities, AMO, the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers and others who are impacted by this bill.

However, before it goes to committee, we want to ensure that there is a fulsome debate in this Legislature and that municipalities and municipal organizations have the opportunity to fully analyze the bill. Over the last two years, municipalities have been asked for a lot of comments on significant issues. Sometimes they have been asked to comment on multiple issues at the same time and sometimes with short deadlines. That can be a real challenge for municipalities. We heard about that challenge from smaller municipalities with limited resources, but we also heard about it from bigger municipalities across Ontario.

As the clerk of Niagara Falls said last summer, "Area clerks are meeting with ministry officials in early July. Comments are due July 27. Niagara Falls city council is on our summer schedule. We don't have a meeting between the information session and the deadline for comments."

In their submission, Richmond Hill asked for a minimum 90-day period once the legislation was introduced

for comment and review by municipal council. That was in a submission that they submitted to the ministry last July. I appreciate that the ministry took the time to read and analyze all of the submissions they received, but I just want to make sure that everyone is clear on the timing.

I expect that before we are very far along in this debate, probably sometime this week, the government members will stand up and say that we need to rush the bill through because we're only two years until the start of the next municipal election and municipalities need time to make changes based on the bill. But they don't point out that there has been eight months since the public consultation finished and 18 months since the last municipal election. It would be highly unfair for this government to have taken all that time themselves before introducing the bill and then not give municipalities and stakeholder organizations the time to analyze it and put forward their concerns.

The government has had 18 months. So far, we have had seven days. In fact, the government didn't provide notice to us that they were introducing this bill last Monday until less than two hours before. As of that morning, it wasn't on their schedule. My point is that the government has taken 18 months and now they look like they want us to rush this legislation through. That isn't fair to municipalities, to the candidates who will be running in the next municipal election and to the voters who want to have their voices heard. It isn't fair to the members on the other side of the House who are trying to do their jobs to work with all of these groups to point out flaws in this legislation so they can make it better.

There are a lot of technical amendments to this bill to modernize elections, such as reducing the need for original signatures to allow electronic filing and removing the need for registered mail so that information can be communicated by email. The best people to tell us whether those amendments to the Municipal Elections Act will work are the people who run the elections and have been recent candidates. They're the people who asked for the changes and they have the experience and knowledge to tell us what will work, what won't and what isn't included in this bill that should be modernized.

We also want to ensure that municipalities of different sizes and different regions have different opportunities to talk about the realities of campaigns in their communities. In the last election, the city of Toronto had almost two million eligible voters. That presents some election challenges. During the election, they made over 26,000 corrections to the voters list and added almost 200,000 names. That is more than the number of eligible voters in most municipalities.

Northern communities which cover large areas face a completely different challenge. Communities where people tend to move more frequently face their own challenges with voters lists. We need to hear from all of these municipalities about what in this act works and what needs to be changed. We need to hear where they need more flexibility and where they want clarification.

That means we need more time at committee and, before that, we need to give them time to analyze it.

We've seen this government try to rush bills through and limit committee hearings, but when it comes to elections and democracy, we can't afford not to take the time to do it right. We want to work with everyone to make sure that this bill will result in fair, effective and democratic municipal elections. As I said earlier, there is only one way that can happen and only one way that we can support the bill, and that is for this bill to ensure that the voice of the people will be heard by supporting our amendment to require a municipal referendum before allowing changes to the voting system.

Whether it's the people who are in the galleries here today, the busy parents working on two jobs who may never get to city hall or the people who choose to come to our country because of our democracy, all citizens deserve a say in our electoral system. This bill, as currently written, would make it so the only people who have a say over which electoral system is used are the people who directly benefit from it.

No government should have that power. That is why we will be putting forward an amendment to ensure that decisions about our democratic system are made by the people and why we cannot support this bill unless the government agrees to that amendment.

Mr. Speaker, there's widespread belief that there should be a referendum before any electoral changes have been made. A poll with Insights West this February found that nearly two thirds, or 65%, of Canadians said that a referendum should definitely or probably be held on any changes to the electoral system.

Mario Canseco, vice-president of public affairs for Insights West, said, "For all the talk about electoral reform that Canadians have been exposed to over the past few months, the only consensus is on the need to hold a referendum on any proposal that is made...."

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A petition calling on the federal government to hold a referendum before making electoral system changes has garnered over 14,000 signatures in less than four months.

Matthew P. Harrington, a law professor in Montreal, said: "Canadians have always recognized that some substantial consultative process by which the voters themselves get a say is required for significant electoral reform. No province has sought to make changes in its electoral system without one."

It is undemocratic when people benefitting from the changes to the electoral system have the sole authority to make the decision on what system is being used.

As I said at the beginning, changes to our electoral system are a greater responsibility. They require a higher standard and a greater consultation than other legislative changes. That has been demonstrated by London, England, by San Francisco, Oakland, Aspen, Minneapolis, Burlington, Berkeley, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island, and even by Ontario in 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the time and to once again show that we understand our greater respon-

sibility and our duty to the people of this democracy. I wish all the best in the debates thus far, and we hope that we can get that democracy built into the bill before it's finished.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate the member for Oxford for his very thorough and well-researched comments about this rather complex bill.

Certainly the low voter turnout in municipal elections is a long-standing concern in the province. I think that it undermines democracy if we don't have healthy participation in the voting process when people go to the polls.

This bill proposes what I see as two very critical tools to help increase voter participation. The first is around changes to campaign contributions. The bill proposes to allow municipalities to prohibit corporations and trade unions from contributing to candidates for city council.

The timing of this bill is quite interesting in that respect because it does come in the midst of the firestorm that we're seeing, as citizens in this province are asking really legitimate questions about the influence of big money and what big money can buy.

We saw, just last week, a report from Campaign Fairness that found that candidates who were supported financially by the development industry—candidates who are running for city council—were twice as likely to get elected as candidates who refused developer money.

The ability for municipal councils to impose rules around developer contributions, corporate contributions and union contributions is important to ensure the integrity of the democratic process, to ensure fairness, accountability and transparency, particularly at the municipal level, given the important role of councils in land use planning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to be able to rise in response to the comments from the member from Oxford and also the member from London West.

The member from Oxford did go through the bill and the various aspects of it. I can say, from my perspective of a career of about 20 years in municipal politics, virtually every one of the things that I had heard from both colleagues and the public about what kind of changes needed to be made to municipal elections, most of that is contained in this legislation: a ban on corporate and union donations; shortening the campaign period; making it more stringent for somebody to become a candidate; and yes, the voting process itself has been something that's been thoroughly debated.

Notwithstanding the flip-flop of many of my former colleagues on Toronto council—who quite substantially supported ranked ballots, but magically, after the last municipal campaign, changed their minds, which leads one to question why. They actually, in this last round, said that they oppose ranked ballots. They tacked on a referendum at the end, but they did say that they oppose it.

Our process, which is in this legislation, does actually require a public process before a municipality enacts that change, and that is extremely important. Nobody would ever suggest that there would be no mandatory public process before this kind of change would be made.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that when we're discussing things like campaign reform in this House today, my own druthers is that this bill should go a little bit further. But in terms of the issue of referendums, I find it interesting that when that member was in government, he ignored the will of residents across this province against amalgamation—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It seems this issue has caused some excitement with some of the members.

I'd like to commend our member from Oxford for his comments. He was a long-time municipal politician before he came here, and a long-time cabinet member. I'm certain that he has lots of experience in municipal politics, probably more than a lot of people in the room.

Anyway, I was glad to hear him go over a number of items, as far as the citizens' assembly, about referendums before making any major changes, and talking about the 60% threshold to pass the ranked ballot, and the issues about recounts. I learned a lot here in the last 60 minutes as the member spoke. It was almost 60 minutes; I think it was about 57 minutes or something. Anyway, it was very interesting when he talked about how they would be tabulated, and a lot of things.

I think there's a lot of information that has to come forward yet. I think, as the member from Oxford said, the sooner we get it to committee and make sure we have those kinds of changes and that kind of debate—and I commend the people who are here in the gallery today who are bringing this forward. But I think there are a lot of concerns, and I'm sure we'll hear more in the afternoon, as we go, on how conflicts could be resolved.

He talked about the different examples down in the United States, where they've had a number of opportunities with ranked ballots and with these types of reforms—where they either haven't gone right or they've had to change them—and about instant runoffs.

I was interested when he said that on ranked ballots, in the countries that were listed, the United States ranks 14th out of 14 in encouraging better turnouts. I think if that's what we're all concerned about—I didn't realize my time is pretty near done here. He raised questions about third-party financing and also the length of the campaign period.

The accuracy of voting lists: As a former returning officer for a number of elections, I understand the accuracy of voting lists. They do not occur. There are real lapses in voter lists.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to take part.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to be able to add my two minutes and two cents on Bill 181, An Act to

amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1998 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts, in response to the very thorough and thoughtful comments from the member from Oxford.

I'm looking forward to also hearing from our critic on municipal affairs and housing, the member from Windsor-Tecumseh, because this is a significant piece of legislation. There are a lot of pieces in it. For many of the details, I know that we're going to be hashing it out in this room and debating. But the member from Oxford did a good job in succinctly breaking it down in that hour.

In Oshawa, we've had the ward system, and then city-wide, and now we have chosen to go back to the ward system. In municipal politics, part of the fun is crafting a system that answers to the constituents, to the members of the community. The members of the community in Oshawa have made that choice to go back to the ward system. Their voices need to be heard; they need to feel heard.

When we're looking at this piece of legislation and talking about ranked ballots—if that is a way for more of our community members to have their voices heard, to really have that be measured and to make change, then I think that's an important choice for the municipalities to have.

I appreciate that there are organizations like Campaign Fairness and others who are here, not just today but who have obviously been a part of the process and hopefully will continue to be. The whole point of democracy is bringing in all of the different partners and voices, and making sure that it is robust, that there's engagement at all parts and all levels. Otherwise, people are not going to have that faith in the process. This starts a great conversation.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our four questions and comments. I can now return to the member for Oxford for his reply.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I want to thank the members from London West, Oshawa, Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Sarnia-Lambton for their comments.

I just want to go quickly to the comments about the minister. The member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore seemed to suggest that there were actually things written in the bill to deal with how this was going to happen. I'll just point out that's all regulatory. The minister may do all these things, but the bill actually does none of those things. So if the minister doesn't do it, it isn't happening. It's not in the bill.

I just wanted to say, though, that we've talked a lot about having referendums. One thing we didn't talk about was one of the things that I heard a lot about during the consultation: the voters list. One of the things I left out—I have a sheet laying here that I didn't get to—was the submissions that were made from three different areas about the voters list. I just want to read them into the record.

First of all, this is a submission from the city of Cambridge. They recommend, "The voters list should con-

tinue to remain the responsibility of MPAC, but greater oversight from the province should be dedicated to ensure that they produce a better product for municipalities."

The second one was from the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers. It said in a position paper, "Creating a voters list is a difficult task, and municipal administrators recognize this. However, municipalities are required to pay MPAC to create the" voters list—the preliminary list of electors—"and then spend additional resources correcting it." They really believe that they have to do far too much correcting. "Several AMCTO members have noted that the current quality relative to costs of the voters list would not be tolerated in any other procurement process. Surely, the standards for fiscal responsibility and proper stewardship of increasingly scarce taxpayer dollars should apply to the voters list as well."

These are comments, Mr. Speaker, that were made about the quality of the voters list. I think the first one says it all. It's not to change what's being done, but to make sure that we become vigilant to make sure it's being done in a way that creates much more accuracy than it's presently doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this provincial Parliament on behalf of my residents in Windsor-Tecumseh. Let me begin this afternoon by—

Interjection.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: —yes, thank you—saying welcome to the members of Campaign Fairness and the other civic-minded groups who are here today to hear this debate. I think they have been very successful in some of their lobbying efforts and I complement them on that.

Let me say off the top, as well, that I am concerned about what appears to be a last-minute rush to push this bill through the House. I believe we're seeing the same thing with the Premier's rush on the proposed legislation on political fundraising. It just seems like we're on a treadmill and we're trying to grind some stuff out.

This bill may help the Premier change the channel on that discussion to some extent; however, I still say, why the rush? Why not shop this bill around now that it's written, take it to the people it will affect and travel it around the province? This can be done quickly, Speaker, and we would hear more voices. You've written it now, and now we want to hear more voices. We would be more comfortable with that approach.

People need to have their voices heard as this bill affects every municipal councillor, mayor and school board trustee right across the province. We seem to be in a hurry, all of a sudden, for some reason. I'm not sure why, but I do know that in politics perception can rapidly become reality. Right now, the perception is that this is a rush job and maybe we should slow it down a bit to make sure that we all get more of a clear understanding of what's going on in this bill and how it will impact our lives.

Speaker, let me also say that Bill 181 is an interesting bill, especially around the ranked ballots. I know it's been an issue for some people in Toronto off and on. I hear it's been raised in Ottawa, Hamilton, London and Kingston. There's not a lot of chatter about it down my way, down in the southwest.

Let me also say, at the beginning, that it's the government's job to propose legislation. The opposition's role is to oppose legislation at times, so I may surprise some people today by being supportive of some of the aspects of this bill—not everything. I do have some concerns.

This bill does make changes, such as moving the date for the opening of the nomination period, making sure more attention is paid to accessibility for all voters. Municipalities would have to develop a plan—a real plan—that identifies potential barriers and a plan to remove such barriers, as well as a plan after the election to do a follow-up to gauge the success of the steps that were taken to make the election campaign and voting day barrier-free.

All municipalities would have the authority to ban contributions from unions and corporations. That's something the Campaign Fairness group has been advocating now for quite some time.

There are some points of the bill that are worthy of support. However, other points in there should be subject to closer scrutiny; third-party advertising, for example. We have to make sure we get the wording right in that section, and I'll expand on that at some length in a moment.

Last weekend, I was home in my riding. I actually squeezed in a couple of hours to sit in the recliner and watch some TV. It was a great TV weekend: We had the Masters golf tournament on, the NDP convention from Edmonton, the Blue Jays had a home-opener.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: You didn't go to Edmonton?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I wasn't in Edmonton, no. I was in my comfortable recliner. I was watching TV, flipping through the channels. The very core of this bill got me thinking, as I was sitting there, enjoying changing the channels. I said, "Is that what this bill is? Are we trying to do that here?" Because for days and weeks in this House we've been talking about little else but fundraising scandal after another, after another, after another. Fundraising quotas for cabinet ministers: Some were upfront about it, some said yes, some denied all knowledge about it. The Premier goes and raises \$3 million at a big fundraiser, and then she'll stand up in the House and say, "Hey, you other two guys that do fundraisers, stop it. Stop it right now, because I'm going to stop it. You must stop it, too." Here we are in the rainy season, and one member of the family has gone out and bought a very expensive pair of rubber boots with diamonds and fur-lining, and all of a sudden she says, "I have my boots. Don't you guys buy anything for the rainy season. I'm going to stop buying boots. You stop buying your boots, too."

Interjections.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: When all else fails, shout down the opposition or change the channel—or try to change the channel. Let's give them something to talk about. Speaker, remember that great song? Bonnie Raitt:

People are talkin', talkin' 'bout people,
I hear them whisper....

That song won the Grammy in 1991; it was the record of the year. You must remember the song, Speaker. If you don't, you'll remember the fall of 1990, the provincial election. The Liberal government lost 59 seats, the worst defeat in Liberal history. History may soon repeat itself, Speaker. Yes, I agree. Let's—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Windsor—Tecumseh has the floor.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I must have been giving them something to talk about.

Let's talk about fundraising scandals, let's talk about selling Hydro One, let's talk about embarrassing backing down on medical marijuana, let's talk about backing down on doubling prescription drugs for seniors and let's talk about why we're changing the channel this week—or trying to.

We have a bill: ranked ballots and third-party advertising. Well, I like the ranked ballots part up to a point, but what have we learned about third-party advertising? I think it's important to take a look at what we have learned about third-party advertising. We'll go to British Columbia first.

Back in 2008, the BC Liberals capped third-party advertising at \$3,000 each, in each constituency, and \$150,000 province-wide for a provincial election. To be fair and on the record, the Liberals said that they were going to do it to create a more level playing field so that wealthy individuals wouldn't be able to hijack the election process. We can probably—or most of us can probably agree that that's a good thing. However, the bill had a chilling effect on non-profits and small charities. That's because the BC bill had no low limit, no minimum spending limit. So non-profit volunteers were trying to figure out what the act would mean to them.

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In order to comment in any way on that election, you had to register as having a third-party interest. You could, if you will, sponsor advertising in any form. Many of the non-profits, afraid of losing their charitable status, opted to self-censor and not comment at any time on anything during that election—not a word on their Web pages. That's because the bill—the bill out there was Bill 42—defined election advertising in really broad terms.

Most of us, when we think about advertising platforms, don't think about websites, emails, social media, public forums or petitions, but the BC Liberals threw in all of those platforms, they put them all into their bill, and the kicker was public communication. What is public communication? Public communication that takes a position on any issue associated with a political party or

candidate. If you did that, you had to be registered in British Columbia as a third party. Even if your group only planned to engage in free or low-cost activities, the BC bill would first have you register as a third-party advertiser.

These non-profits couldn't print or distribute leaflets to their neighbours. They couldn't start a Facebook page. Charities and non-profits do have a homepage, most of them. Sometimes these pages post an analysis of government legislation that impacts their mission statement or the purpose for which they exist. The Liberal bill in BC meant that that analysis, which may have been posted on their homepage for a long time—for years, even—suddenly, overnight, became considered as election advertising. In all fairness, does that sound like the government was trying to level the playing field in restricting the most wealthy from hijacking an election? I'm just saying.

I know Ontario's Bill 181 does actually exempt no-cost Facebook posts and the like, along with other advertising that incurs no expenses. That's a good thing. But I'm still a little nervous about what happened in BC, and I think we all should be concerned about it. Citizens were deprived of diverse views. At the end of the election, when these third-party advertisers were forced to file their expense reports—and all third-party advertisers had to do that; and don't forget, it was supposedly brought in to keep the most wealthy from hijacking the election process—232 disclosure reports were filed and more than half of them claimed they spent \$500 or less. More than three quarters of them spent less than \$2,000.

So what was the purpose of restricting third-party advertising with that approach? What is the real purpose for what is being proposed with this legislation, Bill 181?

Voices that would normally have been heard in BC were silenced. The free speech of smaller organizations was threatened. Groups—and we have them in Ontario here; for example, let me mention the Sierra Club. In British Columbia, the Sierra Club, based on precautionary legal advice, decided to pretty well shut down during the election rather than risk an errant communication and lose their charity status. Speaker, as you know, under federal law, you'll recall that registered charities are prohibited from conducting any partisan political activity. No doubt, that curtailed the ability by this environmental group to have a say, stage a debate, engage the electorate or change the agenda on environmental issues. They couldn't take a position on a candidate, a party or an issue. I, for one, want all voices heard, especially the voices of the environmental movement. Be it on climate change, be it on cap-and-trade or cleaning up the Great Lakes, I want to hear those voices. I don't want them silenced. When we choose the leaders of the future, surely we want to be able to ask them where they stand on the issues nearest and dearest to our hearts.

I think we need time, more time to study aspects of this bill, Bill 181. For example, let's look at Toronto. Toronto allows only individuals to make a campaign donation—no corporations and no unions. Bill 181 would

seem to make it illegal for non-individuals, such as community groups well known in the area—the Transit Alliance, CodeRedTO or TTCriders—to incur expenses by promoting better transit options during the entire six-month municipal campaign period. That should cause alarms to be ringing for some of us, if not all of us.

For example, if a municipal candidate in Toronto makes selling off Toronto Hydro as a campaign issue under Bill 181, no community groups would be able to mount a campaign against such a proposal—or in favour of it, for that matter.

Remember, Speaker, a few years ago the Fighting for Life campaign put on by the Canadian Cancer Society? They wanted municipalities to disclose the use of carcinogens. Bill 181 would prevent such a community-minded group from waging such a legitimate environmental campaign ever again in Toronto during a municipal election. And my friends at ACORN would be prevented from remounting its Toronto Tenants Vote campaign.

Last week, I met with the good folks who started Campaign Fairness. I met with the member from Parkdale–High Park, Ms. DiNovo, and we had a chat about the proposed bill. Campaign Fairness has been lobbying for years for aspects of this bill. They were among the first to propose banning corporate and union contributions in municipal election campaigns. This bill would make that an option for all 444 municipalities in Ontario.

Campaign Fairness wanted to limit the impact that the development industry has on municipal elections, and my hat goes off to the volunteers of Campaign Fairness—people such as Bobby Eisenberg, David Donnelly, my friend Jack Gibbons, and Robert MacDermid from the political science department at York.

But, Speaker, think about this for a moment: These folks have been campaigning for years against corporate and union donations in municipal elections. Now, they've been banned in Toronto—not the group but corporate and union donations. But if someone, say, running for mayor of the city of Toronto had as part of her platform a promise to bring back corporate and union donations, under Bill 181, if it isn't changed, the good folks at Campaign Fairness would not be allowed to campaign against the idea of allowing unions and corporations to finance municipal elections.

That, in my opinion, is why we have to look carefully at what has happened in British Columbia—what is still transpiring in British Columbia—and to make sure the wording in Bill 181 works for Ontario, and works for all of us in Ontario.

Until now, BC has been the only province in the country to require registration if an organization or association had plans to discuss election issues, even if they didn't intend to spend money, or very little money, at all. The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association, FIPA, was really concerned because the way the law was written, it meant—and here's a quote to remember—an “absolute ban on unregistered” freedom

of “expression is unconstitutional as it applies to things like handwritten signs or electronic communications with a value of zero.”

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The BC courts ruled in a 2-1 split decision that the Liberal plan was okay. However, FIPA has been granted leave to appeal that decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. That appeal has yet to be heard. I note, for some strange and unexplained reason, in the province of Ontario the Attorney General has just applied for intervenor status in that Supreme Court case revolving around the BC ban on third-party advertising. So it makes me wonder why, and why this section of the bill is being pushed through now instead of waiting for a ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada. Why not push ahead, for example, with the ranked balloting option for those municipalities that eventually decide that's something they'd wish to consider, as well as the many other unobjectionable parts of the bill—the change in the nomination dates, the emphasis on accessibility and so on—and leave the third-party advertising piece till later?

I raise these points because I read with interest issues raised by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and a study that found BC's third-party advertising rules actually had a chilling effect on the debate during the 2009 provincial election. Voter access to information was reduced as a result of that chill. That study was prepared for the CCPA as well as the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association and the BC Civil Liberties Association. They looked at 60 charities—non-profits, coalitions, labour unions and citizens' groups. Here's a quote:

“Because most non-profits are careful to remain non-partisan, the prospect of being publicly labeled as a ‘third-party advertising sponsor’ created anxiety for many of the study participants, with some simply choosing to opt out of public engagement during the election entirely.

“More than one in four participant groups self-censored as a result of the rules. Six groups censored public communication activities specifically to avoid having to register as advertising sponsors. Others self-censored due to confusion and/or concerns about the risks of inadvertently breaking the rules.

“Most of the activities groups censored had little to do with commercial advertising. For example, nine groups did not post new material on their websites; four removed existing material from their websites; and four refrained from issuing or endorsing a call for changes to government policy.”

Speaker, I hope this next example raises your eyebrows as it did mine: “Particularly troubling is the revelation that five groups avoided commenting in mainstream media stories due to confusion about the rules or a desire to keep a low profile during the campaign and avoid coming to the attention of Elections BC.” Big Brother is out there watching in British Columbia.

I hope you would agree, Speaker, that despite whatever good intentions the BC law may have started out

with, “the chill effect these rules created went well beyond activities that we would normally think of as advertising, and cast a shadow on quintessential forms of democratic participation and free speech.” That's according to one of the co-authors of that study, Heather Whiteside.

The policy director of the BC Civil Liberties Association, Micheal Vonn, says, “The citizens of British Columbia were deprived of the full range of voices that would normally be heard during an election as a result of these rules. Speech rights are our most precious freedom, and are never more vital than during elections.”

We don't want this bill, Bill 181, to silence the voices of the community groups in Toronto, be they campaigning for better transit or tenants' rights or anything else.

Speaker, I've mentioned the bill was brought in supposedly so that the big spenders in British Columbia wouldn't be able to hijack the election process. Well, Vince Gogolek is a board member with the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association. He says, “But these rules heavily regulated small spenders—the very groups that should benefit from third-party advertising limits.”

These small non-profits and charities studied for this research paper I've been quoting really represent the views of the most vulnerable citizens in society. Yet, as co-author Heather Whiteside puts it, “For these groups to be self-censoring during an election, when their perspectives and voices are most needed, is disturbing.”

As I've said, the ranked ballot portion of Bill 181 is okay for those who want it, but the clauses dealing with third-party advertising need more scrutiny.

The BC study did make a number of recommendations that would improve the third-party bill here, including established minimum spending thresholds of \$1,000 dollars in a single constituency and \$5,000 province-wide before the requirement to register as an advertising sponsor kicks in. That's seen as much better than having them register, even if they engage only in free or very low-cost activities.

Be more distinct in your wording of the bill to get rid of any ambiguities. Tighten up definitions, such as the definition of what constitutes election advertising, so it's easy to interpret and adequately deals with the realities of online communication.

It was also suggested that an exemption be made to exempt volunteer labour from the definition of an election advertising expense, as is the case in BC for political party and candidate expenses.

Another suggestion was to exempt charities from the rules altogether, as they must already demonstrate they are non-partisan and make a contribution to the public good in order to achieve and keep their registered charity status.

The third-party advertising bill in BC started out for provincial elections, but in 2013, based largely on the provincial Bill 48, was enacted to cover municipal elections as well.

The writ period for a provincial election may be as short as a month for the province, but Bill 181 would apply from when nominations open in May until voting day at the end of October. Shutting down free speech for one month is bad enough, but doing it for six months should be concerning to us all.

Speaking of a month, I do find it curious, as I've said, that just a month ago, Ontario's Attorney General applied for intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada to jump into the challenge between the government and British Columbia and the province's Freedom of Information and Privacy Association.

There is no question that big money has no place in municipal elections in Ontario, but as we've seen with the BC example, surely—and I'm not calling you Shirley, Speaker—there's a better way than attacking non-profits and charities and undermining their democracy, writing them off as collateral damage in the guise of protecting them from a big money campaign of third-party advertising.

Speaker, there will be an appeal heard at Canada's Supreme Court, and if I may, some quotes from the application for leave to appeal, because they are so germane to whatever wording we may end up with here in Ontario when it comes to third-party advertising as a component to Bill 181: "This case is about political expression and the government onus of proving that such restrictions are justified." This act "imposes an absolute ban on unregistered expression that falls within the very broad definition of election advertising. The applicant takes issue, not with the registration requirement, but with the absence of a minimum threshold for registration....

"Without a minimum threshold, the prohibition includes even homemade signs in windows and bumper stickers. It captures even the smallest expense; the signs of the small voices, lone voices and independent voices are forbidden during election campaigns unless the person has registered" in order to comment; for example, a person protesting outside the Legislature or a courthouse "with a sandwich board covered by banners espousing positions on issues, many of them of a public nature. Those with bumper stickers on vehicles expressing views on environmental or economic matters, those who place signs in home windows or signs on their property expressing support for or disputing a proposal or initiative, and those with picket signs or other messages advancing a point of view on a public issue, all will be affected in the event that the issue leaks into the platforms of a party or candidate during an election" in British Columbia.

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Here's a salient point from this brief, bullet point 10: "In light of the expanding regulatory sphere in Canadian society, the applicant's position is that even when governments have a reasoned apprehension of harm that is sought to be addressed through regulation, courts must use rigour when scrutinizing administrative incursions into fundamental freedoms ... in order to safeguard

Canadians' fundamental rights. These incursions can collectively result in a 'regulatory creep' which will have insidious, indeed Orwellian, consequences if allowed to propagate with minimal or no justification, as occurred in this case."

Speaker, let us remind ourselves that this BC bill had no minimum threshold of expenditures, while in other provinces with third-party advertising restrictions—be it \$500 or \$1,000 or whatever. Without a minimum, the result is that persons who, within a campaign period, make and wear a T-shirt outside of their house that says, "Vote for the environment," or tape a sign on their car window that says, "End poverty," must register as election advertisers or be at jeopardy of a \$10,000 fine and a year in jail in British Columbia.

That's why the BC bill is going to the Supreme Court of Canada. They're bringing in blanket coverage in BC merely as a means of administrative convenience. Everyone will be covered to make it easier on the bureaucracy, but at the expense of our democratic freedoms.

The application for leave to appeal, Speaker, also reminds us about government red tape. In the 1980s, the Law Reform Commission of Canada estimated that any individual was subject to more than 40,000 provincial regulatory offences. The Department of Justice counted more than 97,000 federal regulatory offences that we all must live by. Trends may be changing, Speaker, but pervasive regulation remains a fact of our everyday lives.

If the BC Court of Appeal majority judgment is allowed to stand, government will be permitted to brazenly breach the fundamental freedoms, with minimal, if any, justification.

The circumstances and manners in which infringements could be carried out in the expanding regulatory sphere are too numerous to count. The consequences could be devastating to our collective commitment to civil liberties. I would hope those points would be raised by Ontario if they gain intervenor status at the Supreme Court on the BC bill, but somehow I doubt that's the Attorney General's intention. Having said that, I do remain curious as to why the rush to judgment on this bill. Why not wait until the BC appeal is heard at the Supreme Court of Canada?

Yes, our Bill 181 has supportive clauses for those municipalities which choose to adopt them, but I'm not convinced that the Liberals are giving the opposition parties, but more importantly, the public—the voters—an adequate opportunity to fully digest the contents of the bill. That's the normal way of doing legislative business: It is customary and courteous to allow the public and the opposition parties time to properly study the bill. There are other bills pending that we could be debating this week. It makes me curious how and why this one jumped the queue, which of course brings me back to changing the channel—switching the conversation, or trying to.

I had to laugh last week, Speaker, when we were discussing the amendments to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. That really was a legislative lesson in how the Liberals work to correct their mistakes, mistakes made

when bills are written and introduced without proper care and attention to detail—and that's why we're recommending caution here.

Speaker, you will recall—you were in the chair—that the member for Nickel Belt spent an hour talking about changes to Bill 178, the Smoke-Free Ontario Amendment Act. In her opinion, Ms. Gélinas said, the entire act is really about just adding four words to the original bill. That's because the Liberals messed it up by originally saying that those who smoke medical marijuana could do so any time, any place, anywhere they wanted. The four words that were put into the bill were “prescribed products and substances”—four words.

That got me thinking. What other four words might the Liberals have considered when they first realized their mistake with the original wording in the bill? How about “We made a mistake,” or “Just covering our actions”? What about “Whoops, did it again,” or maybe “We should have consulted,” or “Didn't think it through”?

I wonder if they thought about these four words: “We should have listened,” or “What were we thinking?”—which naturally leads to these four words: “What were we smoking?” Four words, Speaker, adding “prescribed products and substances,” not “Who thought this up?” or “Who can we blame?” or “Not our finest hour.” My favourite: “Can we prorogue instead?” How about “We're in trouble now,” or “What would Dalton do?”

Speaker, before getting to the four words, I wonder how many four-letter words were tossed about when they first realized what a mess they had made of that legislation. How about—no, I think I'll leave it to your imagination, Speaker. After all, this is a family show.

Speaker, I know you remember the name Stephen Harper, so let's take a relatively short trip back in time. In 2000, Stephen Harper was president of the National Citizens Coalition. He filed a constitutional challenge to the Canada Elections Act. The act stated that third parties are limited to spending a max of \$3,000 in each electoral district, or up to a total of \$150,000 nationally. Mr. Harper felt spending limits on third parties were an infringement of his right to free expression. They restricted the manner and scope in which he could engage in free speech.

At trial, the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench ruled the limits infringed on section 2(b) of the charter and could not be justified under section 1. The court ruled that the feds had not provided enough evidence to show that spending limits were reasonable. The feds appealed to the Alberta Court of Appeal. That court dismissed the federal appeal and ruled in favour of the lower Alberta court. The feds then took it to the Supreme Court of Canada.

By now, it was 2004. Mr. Harper had changed jobs and was the new leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

The Supreme Court did rule that limiting spending by third parties during a federal election campaign did violate our guaranteed freedom-of-expression rights. However, they then had to consider whether that viola-

tion was reasonable and justifiable, given that the limits imposed were the results of government legislation.

In a split 6-3 decision, the majority of the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the constitutionality of third-party advertising spending limits. Justice Bastarache, writing for the majority, said that these “limits are necessary to prevent the most affluent” citizens “from monopolizing election discourse and consequently depriving their opponents of a reasonable opportunity” to express themselves.

He went on to say that “individuals should have an equal opportunity to participate” in elections, and that third-party advertising limits “seek to create a level playing field for those who wish to engage in the electoral discourse.”

Oh, if only it were so, Speaker. If only that BC law I referenced earlier had been written in such a way as not to send a chill through the membership and executives of the non-profits and charities, and held them back from the intent of Justice Bastarache's ruling.

A poorly worded law is wrong; it's a mistake.

1600

Speaker, even though the clock may be broken, twice a day it's right; it's correct. It doesn't mean much the rest of the time we look at it, but twice a day, it will show the correct time.

Writing for the other judges in that Supreme Court 6-3 split decision, Justice McLachlin wrote, for the minority, that the legislation infringed the freedom of expression and the “limiting legislation prevents citizens from effectively communicating their views.” The minority judges “considered this a serious incursion on freedom of expression in the political realm. They were of the view that freedom of expression includes the right to attempt to persuade through ‘peaceful interchange.’ Spending limits impede citizens from effectively communicating through the national media and mail. Instead, citizens are confined to minor local dissemination of their views. The result is that registered political parties and their candidates have the exclusive right to express ideas during an election.”

Speaker, I'll conclude that portion with a final note from Justice McLachlin. She said that “Financial limits imposed on citizens' right to express themselves through advertising amount to a virtual ban on their participation in political debate during the election period. The only space left in the ‘marketplace of ideas’ is for political parties and candidates.”

Bill 181 has some merit in many areas. I want to publicly thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for arranging a personal briefing on his proposed bill. We sat down last week with seven staff members from his ministry—Brian is here today—and they walked us through a slide deck outlining the highlights of the bill.

We were told that the ministry received about 3,500 submissions during its consultation on this proposed bill. Most of them concentrated on ranked ballots, campaign finance, enforcement, accessibility and third-party ad-

vertising. Ranked ballots may be a larger issue for voters in Toronto, Hamilton, London, Ottawa and Kingston. They may think about it more there than we do in the rest of the province. But I think it will be interesting to see just how many of the municipalities actually exercise that option and introduce it in time for the next municipal election in 2018.

I'm sure incumbents are out there now, crunching the numbers to see if they can determine if it's in their favour, to their advantage to bring it in. We'll see motions introduced, perhaps. Whether they pass or not will be another matter.

I recognize, of course, that school board trustees will not be subject to the option of ranked ballots at this time, but the door has been left open for that to change in the future.

The shorter period for nominations makes some sense, I guess. For my second term on Windsor city council, I registered in January, to let all would-be challengers know I'd be out there campaigning.

Now candidates won't be able to officially declare their intentions until May 1. That won't stop anyone from holding a news conference in January and saying, "By the way, on May 1, I'll be filing my nomination papers. I'm just letting you know that I'll be out there." They can do that but they can't raise any money and they can't spend any money on their municipal election campaign until May 1.

You'll have to have your nomination papers into the clerk's office by the last Friday in July, as opposed to the second Friday in September. You'll also need 25 eligible voters to sign your nomination papers. If you're in a municipality where there's a ward system, these voters don't have to live in your ward. They just have to be eligible to vote in any other ward within that municipality. Speaker, the reason for that, of course, is that you may be elected in a ward, but when you're speaking at council or voting in council, you're voting on behalf of all the members of your municipality.

I know, Speaker, as I'm sure you do, that we have to do better in formulating a voters list, be it for municipal, provincial or federal elections. I see that the current working group looking at that will continue to identify and pursue long-term solutions for an improved voters list, and that's a good thing.

I think everyone in this House, the last time we went knocking on doors, in the last provincial election, found out that the voters list was not so good. It hadn't been updated in a long time, and it hadn't been kept updated for a while.

I've already mentioned that municipal clerks will be tasked with preparing a plan for the identification, removal and prevention of barriers that affect voters and candidates with disabilities. I think that's a really good thing. I know, in my municipality, the last time, I was approached by people from the hard-of-hearing community, who said that when city council candidates got on our local cable program on Cogeco, because there was no sign interpretation going on at the same time that the

candidates were making their pitch, it wasn't all that valuable to the members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. They wanted city council to pay for the interpreter. I proposed that at council, and asked for a report so that would happen at the next election. Unfortunately, I left a year before that term was up and ended up here. I don't know if indeed that happened in the last municipal election down there or not.

It makes sense to have the clerk prepare a plan to identify the barriers that candidates or voters face, and afterwards, after all those barriers are eliminated or most of them are eliminated, to do a follow-up plan to say, "Okay, what worked, what didn't work, and how do we improve on a go-forward basis?"

I've also had a lot to say about third-party advertising. I won't repeat those concerns, except to say the government should take a good, hard look at what is being proposed in this section of the bill, because there are weaknesses in there, and it should be addressed when this bill gets to committee.

The bill will tighten up the rules for any victory celebrations, setting new spending limits on how much you can actually spend on your victory party or your party of support for the volunteers. There are going to be new limits in there as well for any gifts that a candidate may shower upon campaign team members. Those spending limits haven't been introduced yet. They will be set out in regulation later.

There's a new time frame for advance polls. They can't commence until 30 days before voting day, so some snowbirds may have to file a proxy form before heading south.

Let me say thank you again to the citizens' group Campaign Fairness for their determined dedication in pushing the minister to bring in legislation so that all municipalities would have the authority to ban contributions from unions and corporations, should they choose.

Campaign Fairness studied financial contributions made in municipalities located in the Lake Simcoe watershed. That study, by York University associate professor Robert MacDermid, showed that corporations gave more money to candidates than did individual citizens. In the Lake Simcoe watershed and the communities there, developers gave 54% of the total from all corporations, and it was found that 60% of these corporate contributions came from outside the municipality in which the candidates were seeking office.

It sort of makes you wonder.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: What percent?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It says 60% of the corporate—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Amazing.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Amazing. I agree, Minister. It is amazing that 60% of the campaign contributions come from outside the municipality in which the candidates are running. It makes you wonder why.

That study focused on the results of the 2014 municipal elections in Aurora, Barrie, Brock, Bradford West Gwillimbury, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, Innisfil, King, Newmarket, Orillia, Oro-Medonte, Ramara and

Whitchurch-Stouffville. One quarter of the candidates—and there were 300 of them running for municipal council within those municipalities—reported contributions from the development industry. Campaign Fairness holds the opinion that the development industry holds too much sway with municipal representatives in those jurisdictions and elsewhere. The public perception is that councillors may feel beholden to those who help them pay for their election campaigns.

Mind you, it will still be up to the individual municipalities to decide if they believe contributions from labour unions and corporations should be banned in their municipalities. Toronto does have such a ban, and various groups in Toronto have lobbied for ranked ballots as well. Ranked ballots may not be the answer for more than a few Ontario municipalities, but all communities will have the option of looking at that possibility.

1610

There are some good points in this bill, as I've said, and I won't repeat everything that I've said about third-party advertising. However, that portion of the bill needs extra care and caution so that we can get it right. There have been too many examples of poorly written clauses on third-party advertising.

I encourage the Liberals to assign a few staffers to take a look at that section of the bill, because I don't think it's perfect the way it's been presented.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Done.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The minister has just said "Done," so thank you, Minister. Yes, please sharpen that up a bit.

Mr. Bill Walker: I hope it's longer than the third-party fundraising bill I raised in the House.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Oh, yes, the third-party fundraising portion.

Interjection: It's okay. The Premier's got that done.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The shorter election period is not a bad thing. I'm sure the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound would agree that the shorter election period is not a bad thing. Making accessibility more of a priority is certainly supportable, overdue, and, by all means, do that.

Applause.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you for the applause. It gave me a chance to grab a drink of water.

I do have a little bit of reference on the municipal scene. I did spend seven years as a city councillor in Windsor.

Mr. Bill Walker: And a good one, at that.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

During that time, I took advantage of the opportunity to seek office at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I was on that board for three terms, and I was also on the board at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario for three terms, serving once as an AMO vice-president and as chair of the large urban caucus. So I do know a little bit about municipal politics, I do know a little bit about running municipal campaigns, and I know

a little bit about municipal financing and municipal campaigns.

I don't know a lot about some of the aspects of this bill, such as the ranked balloting. I've never experienced that. I've read a little bit about it. I'm not yet convinced that a large majority of our 444 municipalities in Ontario will see that as something they want to jump aboard with, but it's an option. This bill will put that out there as an option. Community groups and voters in those municipalities can have input and say on that, whether they think it works for them.

The third-party advertising works in some areas, if it's well written. That's something to look at. Banning corporate and union donations is also something that we need to take a look at.

I will repeat that, as I said in the beginning, for some reason I feel it's rushed. This bill just came forward. I thank the minister again for the presentation, the briefing I had from his staff. That was well received. But it just seems that of all the other bills that are in front of us, this one seems to be getting—I wouldn't call it the bum's rush, Minister; I don't want to call it that, but you're familiar with the term. It just seems that we're pushing this along, pushing it out the door and down into committee. That's not necessarily a bad thing, getting it to committee, but I do hope that we will spend time shaping it and fashioning it in such a way that it can be more approachable and more acceptable to municipalities.

Because it has happened so quickly, I haven't had the opportunity yet to have a full discussion with my friends at AMO to see where they stand on the bill. I know that within our caucus we have yet to actually sit down and have a full and frank discussion on the merits of all of it. I hope we'll do that tomorrow. But I want to thank you for the opportunity to stand today and speak for this length of time on the bill. There are other aspects that I didn't get into, and I heard my friend from Oxford mention several of those as well.

Municipal politicians, to me—being a former one—as the former mayor of Welland will attest to, you are the most approachable because people see you in their community every day.

I get a train down here on Sunday night and I go back home to Windsor on Thursday night, but when I was on city council, no matter where I went in the community, I was engaged every day in issues of a municipal nature. I'm sure it was the same for the member from Kitchener-Waterloo when she served on the school board and as president of the provincial school boards' association. She was approached pretty well every day by members of the community wanting to talk about education matters. When you're a councillor or mayor in a community, you're on the street every day, you're dealing with people every day on municipal issues. I know my phone was always ringing, 24/7. Be it sidewalk issues, snow removal issues, tree-cutting issues, garbage pickup, it didn't matter; the phone was ringing all the time.

You can't get away from municipal politics. As brighter people than me have said, all politics are local,

and there's nothing more local than municipal politics. So when we shape legislation here to make the way elections are held and financed back in our home communities, I think we must take great care that we do so in such a way that there will be no misunderstandings, no ambiguity about what we're trying to do. I think, in all good intentions, we have to put forward legislation that would benefit us all down the road, without challenges.

I'm going to wrap up now because I know there are probably others in the caucus who want to speak to this bill. I want to thank you for your time this afternoon, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. You used four-word segments, and you raised some good points.

We want to clean up the act, so we listened to the people. We included AMO. The voters lists matter. Ranked ballots are fairer—easy as one, two, three. A one-year consultation; four days of debate. Standing committees can work. So I begin with that and an undertaking to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, who has a completely different approach than my other critic, to actually get staff looking at some of the issues he's raised. I've already asked staff to go over all the points that have been raised and to specifically come up with a response and/or a change, given those points have been raised. I think the member opposite knows that I'm sincere when I say that. So when we get standing committee, this is about coming up with the best possible bill we can, and we will do that.

Municipalities can have referendums any time they want.

Mr. Bill Walker: How about the Green Energy Act? Tomorrow?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Well, I'll give you another example. We were told that amalgamation wouldn't occur without consent. Five municipalities had a referendum. The average turnout was 88%, and 97.4% said that they didn't want it. When they were in government, they pushed ahead with it anyway. So don't give us lectures about—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I enjoyed the presentation by the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. He obviously talked a bit about ranked ballots. We know that certainly that stands in contrast to the long-standing tradition of first-past-the-post, which goes back hundreds of years in our British system. It goes back thousands of years, if you think of ancient Greece, for example. Think of the Greek Olympics. Much of that—thousands of years of foot races. The first one to cross the line wins. It's even more simple than what we just heard about previously. Think of the modern marathon. The rules haven't changed. There's a white line to start, a white line to end, and the first person over that white line with the shortest elapsed time wins. Think of horse races. You bet that X horse

will win Y race, you know, unless the runner or the candidate's disqualified—maybe the race is cancelled. We've had these rules for many, many years.

1620

July 3 is the Queen's Plate, the 157th running of the Queen's Plate. It's based on first-past-the-post. I will note that just last weekend was Keeneland, down in Kentucky. A Canadian-bred three-year-old won the race at Keeneland. I attended races down there a few years ago with my son Brett. The winner of that race, the horse, is called Shakhimat—Canadian-bred. This horse has an eye on the upcoming Queen's Plate. If it crosses the line first, it wins—pretty simple.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for his thoughtful one-hour lead-in. It's hard, you know, to actually get up and do an hour lead when you have a bill as thick as this, which is amending a number of sections of the Municipal Elections Act and the Municipal Act, without having had the opportunity to have any discussion with your caucus and, perhaps, your researchers and to get legal opinion. He did a great job, having to do that only having heard from the government at this point.

He raised a lot of good points. One of them for me, particularly, is the prohibition of lodging campaign issues or issues around campaign times. When else would you want to lodge an issue, if you haven't been able to get it addressed by your existing municipal council and it continues to be an issue in your riding? I'll take mine, for example: There's an issue going on right now where the conservation authority is becoming more development-interested than they are, perhaps, conservation-interested. There's a huge group of people from probably a dozen or so organizations, as well as 200 or 300 individuals, who are opposed to this. So the best time, of course, for them to start a campaign would be around a municipal election, so that they can try and get people elected who would actually support their movement because, clearly, at this point they don't feel that their issues are getting addressed with the existing municipal council.

I think that this really will have a chilling, silencing effect on people. Certainly for me, freedom of speech and freedom of information is one of our basic rights. Those are my short comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It is a pleasure to comment on my friend from Windsor–Tecumseh. I must say I have a lot of respect for the member. We sit on some committees together. We might not agree on certain things, but he certainly has a way to present things. I always listen, Speaker; I always listen.

But one of the comments that I want to dwell on a little bit is the rushing. I hear this over and over again. I'm sure that the members on this side and the members on that side were around when this was launched about a year ago. About a year ago, it was announced that this

was what we were going to do. We embarked on it. So it's about a year. Under 3,500 submissions, Speaker. So I just say that there has been enough, and we're going to do a lot more. As we go through this House, we debate, you talk to your stakeholders, and there will be an opportunity.

I just want to touch on ranked ballots a little bit, Speaker, as you heard me speak specifically about that. Municipalities will have a choice. I suspect that not all 444—whatever it is—are going to jump at this. I think there's going to be a learning curve. There will be some that might and some that don't, and that's a choice that they make.

I mean, I was on council when we made the decision—our council—to do the vote by mail. There was a lot of skepticism, but, man, we had a huge voter turnout. We tried it.

I would say that we're going through this process. We talk about referendums. This really more refers to the previous speaker. I remember the AMO convention in 1998 or 1999 when the then-Minister of Municipal Affairs just did Toronto in and told the rest of us delegates, "Be ready. You're next if you don't do it on your own." That was consultation, Speaker: one announcement at AMO.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments, and we return to the member for Windsor–Tecumseh for his response.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, the member from Welland and the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for their observations on what I've had to say.

If I could, my friend from Northumberland–Quinte West took exception to when I was saying that we were rushing this. It's not the consultation period of a year ago and now we feel rushed; it's that the bill was tabled a week ago and now we're discussing it today. The custom is you table it and it could be weeks later or months later or several months later that we get the opportunity in the House to discuss it. During that length of time, we have had time to consult, call up people who will be affected, get their opinion, talk to some lawyers about the legality of certain clauses and talk about it amongst our own caucus members. We, in the third party, have not caucused this yet at all. I doubt the opposition has taken it to their caucus members for full input yet.

When I talk about "rushed," it's the same way I feel about what the Premier is doing now: rushing through on her spending on the political fundraising issue. It just feels like, "Okay, I've done my fundraising. I know you've got some coming up but put a stop on them because I'm going to bring in legislation."

We have to have more courtesy in the House and more consultation on the length of time that we spend. In this case, I would recommend, since we're doing it in such a hurry, it's not too late—now that the bill has been written, it might be refined in committee—to take it to a few places around the province. Take it to Ottawa, take it

to Kingston, take it to Windsor, and actually put it in front of people and get their input—real input on the bill—and then we'll see what we end up with. I would suggest it would be a much better proposition than what's in front of us now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'll be sharing my time this afternoon, Speaker, with the member for Ottawa South and the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

First, I want to begin by thanking the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ted McMeekin. Ted has done a tremendous amount of work on this particular bill and I want to thank him for bringing it forward.

Before I get into my remarks, I have to echo the comments of our member from Northumberland–Quinte West about the idea that somehow this is an attempt to change some channel. At least one year of consultation has gone on, thousands of public comments on this particular bill, and yet it is trying to be framed as somehow other than what it is, and that simply is a review of the Municipal Elections Act that happens as a matter of course after every municipal election. So in that manner, I hope that the people who are following this debate on television will understand that that's what is going on here. There has been a year-long consultation and thousands of submissions. That's why it's here today, for no other reason than that.

The bill is going to deal with a variety of issues; I'm going to focus on one. Just for a highlight for those following on television, it will deal with ranked ballots, campaign financing, the campaign period, accessibility and the voters list, among other things.

I thought, before I get into my comments about ranked ballots, I would do just a couple of other things, and that is to remind people what we're doing here today is providing opportunity and providing choice for the municipal order of government. We are not mandating that they do this. We are providing them, through this legislative change, should it get passed by the will of this Legislature, the opportunity to adopt a different way of electing people in their home ridings. They can choose, if they wish, to hold a referendum or a plebiscite. Again, we are not mandating that they do that. I think we're asking that they hold at least one public meeting so that people can begin to get some awareness of the opportunity that's in front of them, but at the end of the day, municipal councils will have the choice on whether to move forward with the ranked ballot system for electing people in their cities, if they so choose.

1630

Speaker, it's important for me to underline that, before I go into my main comments. That is because I was on council as well, during the Harris years, and I can tell you that the relationship, I would say, between the provincial government of the day and the municipal order of the government at that time was very, very different. I can tell you—and I've said this before here—that's why a lot of people who were municipal councillors at the time

chose to run provincially, because of the way the municipal order of government was treated in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

I just want to underscore that we're providing choice—not mandating—respecting that order of government and letting them decide what they would like to do on a go-forward basis.

I want to speak to ranked ballots a little bit, if I can. I only have four or five more minutes. One of the reasons that this is viewed as being a good idea is that people believe that it will bring more civility to elections. I'm not going to go into what ranked ballots mean. I don't have time to go into the detail of explaining the system, but it's not really that complicated. People also feel that a ranked ballot system may do something around reversing this trend on low voter turnout.

I've never been one who has bought into the reasons why we have low voter turnout, whether it's municipal, provincial or federal. When I hear arguments about needing to change systems to achieve a higher voter turnout in these elections, I bristle a little bit because, quite frankly, I don't think we can do anything to make it any easier than it already is. It doesn't mean this won't make it better, and it may. But it bothers me that there is low voter turnout. We can't make it any easier. People, I think, have just lost the value in a vote and their ability to freely and democratically cast a ballot, and that bothers me greatly.

I have my own theories, and I'd like to talk just a little bit—I only have a few minutes today, as I said. But quite frankly, one of the reasons I believe that there is low voter turnout—and I'm tying this back to one of the reasons why people suggest we should use ranked ballots—is the way we treat ourselves. When you talk about an attitude among members of the public, if you're in the coffee shops in your riding, politicians, I think it's fair to say, are not generally held in very high regard. We can decide whether that's justified or not. But one of the reasons it is the way that it is, I think, is the way we treat ourselves in this place and the way we talk about each other in this place.

I've been blessed since 2003, as I've said before, to be elected four times and, each of those times, to be in government. When you're in government, you've got to take the shots. I don't mind throwing some back either, when I get the opportunity. But that's what we have to do: We have to take them.

But there is so much language and innuendo and smear. I think that when you damage what you think is the brand of the government, you're not just damaging the government. You're damaging all politicians and all brands. If somehow people think that a ranked ballot is going to increase voter participation—it may do that. But I personally think that if you want to help get people more engaged in the political process, if you want to get them to respect this process more, then we should start thinking about how we treat each other. Because when you treat somebody poorly on a personal level, you're doing the same for everybody who is an elected official. That's truly, absolutely what I believe.

I've heard language in here about fundraising scandal—staggering; scandal; fundraising. Everybody has been fundraising, since I came here in 2003, under exactly the same rules, yet from that side to this side, it's a scandal.

Speaker, if I went back, how far would I have to go—I've been here since 2003—to find the first time that a member of the Conservative Party or a member of the NDP stood up in this place and asked for us to change the system on fundraising? When would that first question have come from the leader of the NDP or the leader of the Conservative Party? That's rhetorical, because everybody knows the answer. Everybody just found religion on this issue about three or four weeks ago. But tomorrow morning, when we walk in here in question period, they're probably going to stand again and ask questions to imply to people who follow this debate on television that we're the only party that was fundraising—under the rules, but they will leave that out of their question.

Speaker, I have seven minutes gone already. I would love to talk about this for a greater period of time. What I would say, if I can just take one more minute, is that I remember very clearly the example of a federal cabinet minister who basically got run out of town because she had bought a \$16 glass of orange juice when she was on a trip overseas. I can remember talking about this with a variety of members, and everybody was having a great joke about it. I can remember saying, "This is terrible. Why should this woman lose her job over spending \$16 on a glass of orange juice?" Why shouldn't the rules be such that that lady could have—if it's a per diem, for goodness' sakes, the person she had breakfast with might have spent 30 bucks. She lost her job over it. Everybody had great fun with it.

If we want to do something about increasing voter turnout and getting people more engaged in the political process, I would say it has more to do with how we treat each other—as someone who has been the subject of personal spears in election campaigns by one particular party—rather than worrying about, necessarily, any grand legislative change, although I do hope that at the end of the day, to the minister, this legislative change goes somewhere in the direction of increasing voter turnout.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I too want to congratulate the minister for putting this bill forward. I know how hard he's worked on it and I know the level of consultation that has gone on in this bill with the public, municipal councils, AMO and staff from across the province. So I want to congratulate him on that.

I want to echo, a little bit later on, the comments of the Minister of Natural Resources, but first I want to say a few things about what's in this bill.

What it does provide is a greater degree of transparency and accountability in the municipal electoral process.

One of the provisions in this bill is going to provide for ranked ballots. I'm ambivalent on ranked ballots, but if indeed it does do what it says, which is to raise the level of participation in elections and take down the level of rhetoric and personal attacks that occur during municipal elections sometimes—because people have to gain the support of people who would support other candidates—then I think that's a good thing. It's an option, of course, that's left up to municipalities. I know that the minister talked a little earlier about campaign finance and I'd like to say a few things about that a little later on.

The campaign period for municipal elections, I always believed, was ridiculously long in terms of when people had to indicate their interest. It gave an advantage to incumbents. I believe that by shortening this, that you've—being an incumbent, maybe I shouldn't—not a municipal incumbent. But I think in order to open up the playing field, to shorten that period of time is an important provision.

Improving the voters lists: I know that I'm echoing the comments from the member from Windsor–Tecumseh. We need to make sure that we can get people off the list, that they can get on the list, and that it's not a complex exercise so that we don't put up barriers to people being able to vote, simply because we can't get a process right. We have to make that available to municipalities.

Also, accessibility: We do have the AODA. There's a change to ensure that there has to be a plan for people with disabilities. I know, for instance, in my community, Terry Green is an advocate for those people who have disabilities. He's blind. He first worked on ensuring people who had a vision impairment were able to vote in municipal elections. I know he did a lot of work—a little bit of a shout-out to him right now.

There needs to be a plan. As our society ages, problems with accessibility and disability are going to increase and so I think that provision in the bill is a very, very important thing.

I would like to talk about campaign finance. These measures here, that we allow municipalities the choice of whether or not they want to accept corporate and union donations—I know we've had some discussion here in the Legislature about what we're going to do moving forward. At this point, I was listening to the Minister of Natural Resources, and he's absolutely right. Ford or GM or Honda would never go out and say, "You know what? Nissan cars are going to kill you." You want to know why? Because it damages the brand. But what it really damages is the category. The kind of discussions that we have here with each other—and it's on all sides. I thought we might need to get some hip waders during question period, with the amount of mud that was getting slung around. We don't do ourselves any favours.

1640

I really firmly believe that in this Legislature all people are here for the right reason. All people are working hard for people inside their communities. The reality is, we all need to raise money for our campaigns. We all really care about our communities. I think that when we

get down to where we've been, it is really not giving the people of this province an accurate representation of what I see around me and what I see across from me.

So I think we all need to think about how we talk to each other and about the kind of words we use to ascribe actions to other people. I think that's a very important point and I want to thank the minister for making that.

As a few final words, I would like to say again that I do believe that this is a good bill. I understand what the member from Windsor–Tecumseh was saying and his concerns around consultation. There has been a broad consultation on this bill. We have a process by which we'll take it through here.

We do have to remember that municipal elections are coming up in two years, so I think that giving councils and voters in municipalities enough advance warning about the ability—and enough room—to use the tools that are provided for in this bill is a prudent thing to do. I think we can have a fulsome debate, a fulsome discussion, fulsome work at committee and get this bill passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I'm pleased to join the debate this afternoon on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I want to lend my support as well to our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the great work that he has done in moving this legislation forward and the contributions that all sides of the House have made toward improving legislation that governs our municipalities.

I know that we've received over 3,400 submissions in terms of how this legislation can be improved. I think those of us who have served on municipal councils in our respective communities understand just how important this work is and how important it is to ensure that there are consistent ground rules in communities all over Ontario that help to strengthen our electoral system at the municipal level.

There are a couple of key areas, Speaker, that have been identified. First of all, ranked ballots: Municipalities will have the option to be able to determine whether or not they would like to proceed with that particular initiative. That's a discussion—as with a number of these other areas—that municipalities will have with their own citizens in their communities in terms of some of those particulars, ranked ballots being one of them.

As well, campaign financing rules or changes that could be put in place by a municipality: Municipalities can determine whether or not they'd like to, in fact, ban corporate or union contributions. It's important that municipalities have those tools at their discretion and that as mature levels of government they are able to make that determination when they have those conversations with their citizens.

I think there are a couple of other things that are related to the financing that would help to strengthen the legislation; first of all, around refunds for nominations to

candidates and the filing of their election information and financial statements. I know in the past, and in various communities, this happens: Individuals decide that they are, for whatever reason, not going to file their financial statements. That's obviously problematic. I know in our community that happened—I believe in the last election or the time before—which prohibited somebody from running in the next election if they didn't file by the appropriate deadline. I think using the refund nomination fees as a bit of a lever to encourage people to comply with this regulation is really important, and also having clerks be required to make a public report of which candidates have filed their financial statements and which did not. That increases, obviously, accountability and transparency for local municipalities.

On the aspect of campaign financing in the broader discussion we're having—and I certainly share the comments of my colleague the Minister of Natural Resources, who I think has effectively articulated why we have an issue with campaign financing. We've all been required to raise funds for political endeavours, for election campaigns, to move forward in the political process. That's something that all political parties have had to do and that's something that likely all political parties will need to do going forward. We all do that as members of the Legislature and we do that within the rules that are laid out, and we'll continue to do that with respect to whatever those rules may look like as we're going forward. The Premier has indicated that conversations will be held with members of the opposition and leaders of the opposition, in fact, to get a better sense of how we, as a Legislature, should be dealing with this issue so that the public has confidence in the democratic system that we have in Ontario.

Speaker, with respect to the campaign period, as someone who has participated in several municipal campaigns, I couldn't agree more that the length and time of the campaign period is far too long. I think most elected municipal representatives would agree. So I think that the changes that are proposed speak to that and are ones that are very positive, as well as accessibility and having responsibility for reviewing legislation across government and working with my colleagues to ensure accessibility through legislation in our ministry. I think this is also an important element of the new legislation that will help to improve accessibility for individuals and municipalities.

Another item that is important to, obviously, the municipal process is the voters list. We know what challenges we've had with voters lists in the past. In some communities, it has been more problematic than in others. Greater consistency and greater opportunity to ensure that all those who are eligible to participate in an election can do so is incredibly important.

Again, I want to thank the minister for his leadership on this and encourage all members of the Legislature to support this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we heard, two of the members opposite did raise the issue of campaign financing and fundraising scandals. My position, really, is that big money has skewed policy, it's skewing decision-making, and I consider it a threat to our long tradition of democracy. It fosters lobbying, it fosters influence-peddling and it obviously fosters political advertising.

Down my way, there is cynicism and there is distrust of what many consider a rigged system, a system bought and paid for by those who are wealthy and those who are powerful. It's time to curtail the lobbyists and the influence of special interests and take the big money out of the process. When you do that, you give the power back to the elected representative.

We have a system now where someone who is beholden to their benefactor hands that power over to that person who is raising the money for them. It skews the system, whether it's \$9 million in political advertising by third parties during an election process or the donations that have been mentioned across the way from companies, unions, individuals, non-profit organizations and other shadow organizations that pull things together, both provincially and at the riding level.

I sincerely feel that the system we have is broken, it's corrupt and it's not to be trusted. I think people are correct when they see an elected representative no longer representing the people who voted them in and essentially serving as a puppet of those who are writing the cheques.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to commend the minister. Certainly, anything to do municipally becomes very complicated, with all the different factors that have to be dealt with, as well as the opinions of local mayors and other bodies, whether it be conservation authorities or other bodies that are dealing with the municipalities on a more regular basis as opposed to here in Toronto and Ottawa. It certainly can become a maze, and the minister has to work through that maze. I commend him for doing it. It's a tough thing to follow.

In reference to the Minister of Natural Resources, I agree with him also that the public perception of politicians is very low, and lots of times, we are our own worst enemies. But secondly, media plays a part in this as well. A lot of times, the media starts the ball rolling about donations and things. If it's legally done, I don't know why they do that. If it's illegal and they've got something, certainly bring it forward, and it should be dealt with appropriately. I think a lot of times, the politicians in this Legislature bite on what the media says, and the media sits up there and smiles as the war starts between "You did this" and "You raised this" and "You raised that," and they're up there smiling and selling papers. I'm not quite sure that that's fair either.

In reference to the financial influence—or peddling, if you want to use that word—large donations are certainly noticed by the party that's being donated to, and it may

have some kind of influence on the final decision. We hope it doesn't, but I'm afraid that it would be a little naive to think it doesn't. So it does play a role.

I think that once we get this straightened out and get to a real set of rules, where nobody can go one way or the other, and where we have to follow a perfect set of rules that will affect this situation, I think we'll be a lot better off for it, and hopefully we can be a little nicer.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I appreciate the comments of the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the member from Ottawa South and the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. They all touched on some really good points. My friend and colleague from Hamilton did as well, and also remember the member from the Conservative side.

It is broke. The best political advice I ever got was from a dairy farmer out in Rockton, when I was running for mayor. He said, "Ted, do you want to get elected mayor? Tell the folk what's broke and how you're going to fix it." So whenever I get stuck, I think about that. What's broke and how do we fix it? We certainly have been doing that kind of thinking here.

I believe we can work together. I think this isn't perfect. We'll get it to the standing committee. I'm quite open: If there are ways we can improve this bill, let's do it together. I'm open to that. I'm open to that because we need to have a relationship of trusted motive here. I don't always agree with what my friend from Hamilton East says, but do you know what? I've always believed he means what he says, thought we may not agree.

I remember once being at a meeting out in my constituency. I think it was about the HST. There was a big crowd there and I was getting hammered. It was in the early stages. This older fellow got up and said, "You know, there's not a single thing that your blankety-blank government's done, Ted, that I agree with." People stood and gave him an ovation, and he said, "No, no. Sit down. Stop clapping. I want to tell you something. While I don't agree with a darn thing Ted and his government have done, I vote—and I'm a Conservative—for him in every election. Do you know why? Because he's never looked me in the eye once and lied to me." Right? It makes a difference, that trusted motive sense there.

I think we can do that. Easy as one, two, three, potentially, on ranked ballots—

Hon. David Oraziotti: Two seconds.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'll stop there. Thanks very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm going to be speaking for 20 minutes, so I'm going to focus most of my time on this. Minister Mauro, the Minister of Natural Resources, and I are on the same wavelength. He made some really good points. Just changing the system doesn't necessarily change voter turnout and how many people are engaged. What he talked about was how we treat each other in

here. I want to commend the minister. We have had a very good personal relationship. I believe he does the right thing—in the case that I've had the privilege to be in his honour. He normally acknowledges us. He makes sure we're aware. He makes sure that the people who are in his midst know that we're all elected representatives. I applaud him for doing that.

I want to point out today, however, that one of his colleagues was in my riding giving out just shy of a million dollars—and that's great for my riding, and I'm appreciative—but I knew nothing about it till 20 to 5 on Friday afternoon. I have my duty day; I had to speak to this bill today, and I had Parkinson's in my office today, and also the Ontario Medical Students Association. I wasn't cancelling them at the last second because someone else didn't have the decency to let me know in time.

They do not hand out Liberal money; they hand out Ontario taxpayer money. Some will maybe say, "Well, it has always been done. That's the way it's done." That doesn't mean it should be the way it's done. It shouldn't be the way it's done. In fact, you have honour and decency—and that's how we raise the level in here. This isn't a one-off. That particular minister has done this to me before. Other members of the government have done that. I think it starts with leadership that says that's not acceptable, period. If you're coming into my riding to do anything, you should have the decency to give me as much forewarning as possible so that I can be on record as well and, wherever possible, be there.

I believe there are some very good members who do the right thing, like Minister Mauro, and I congratulate him and I applaud him for that. But at the end of the day, we've got to walk the talk and all serve in the same capacity to do that, especially outside of this room here. Lots of things get done in here, but when we're in our ridings—I was elected by the people of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I should be the person who's consulted and made aware of that, as all of us in our respective cases should be. So I hope the government will actually do that.

Minister Mauro, thank you for leading the charge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Ottawa South will reply.

Mr. John Fraser: I want to begin by thanking the members from Haldimand-Norfolk, Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound—and I take his point very clearly: You should be there. That's always the way that I operate, and many people on this side do. It is a two-way street. There are sometimes some issues of trust that we have to work together on to be able to do that.

What I want to say is specifically about the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and his willingness to work with members on all sides of this Legislature to try to make this bill better. That's a sincere expression of the kind of person that he is, and it gives me faith in how things work here.

The tone of this debate this afternoon—we've had some discussion about campaign finance, and if we had been having it at 10:30 this morning, it wouldn't have sounded the way that it did in here. I was glad that the member from Haldimand–Norfolk didn't make any distinction about who he was talking about, didn't make distinctions about people on the other side of the aisle—and the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

The reality is, when people elect us, they expect us to work together. When we actually get to the point where we are really working at cross purposes—instead of that tension and balance that's needed between opposition and government—and we get off track on things that aren't central to the things that are most important to Ontarians, then I think we're doing them a disservice.

Again, I want to congratulate the minister. I think this is an excellent bill. I think it will address some critical issues inside municipal elections. I want to thank him for his candour and his openness to any suggestions that you might have.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill, and I want to applaud my colleague Ernie Hardeman, the member from Oxford, a long-time municipal politician. He was the mayor. He went on to be called warden, although I believe, through him, he was actually more of a regional chair; it doesn't really matter. He became chair of ROMA, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association. So he comes from a strong history and pedigree of talking about municipal politics.

I think what he has shared with us most succinctly in here today is that it's the respect for democracy, and that the referendum would be required before anything is going to be moved forward, particularly to gain support from our party. I believe he is prepared to support to get to second reading so that it can actually be debated and have amendments, a key amendment being that there is time for a referendum to ensure municipalities—the Minister of Municipal Affairs just stood in the House and said he is open to ways to improve. I'm hopeful again. He said he's sincere, and people vote for him for that. So I believe that at the end of the day, this is one.

1700

He talked about the ability for referendums in communities, but I want to remind him that in the Green Energy Act, there is no ability for the local municipality. They've changed and they've tweaked it for them to have a little say, but there's no ability for them to say not. My colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, in this House just a week ago—he has a community called Dutton that was not a willing host, and they ended up with wind turbines in their backyard. So that's not a referendum opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

In my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, I continually hear from people who want the ability to have a referendum and that the local municipal council be given back the power to say, on behalf of their people who come out and say, in overwhelming numbers, “We

don't want it”—at the end of the day, I believe there's opportunity here to continue to improve a lot of legislation, and I believe that there's an opportunity for that minister to take that forward with the Green Energy Act.

We truly believe that there's opportunity to improve a lot of the legislation. I think it's a good thing that we're reviewing and modernizing our rules. I believe we look forward, particularly through our critic, to reviewing the bill; to working with municipal officials to ensure it reflects what they need to run modern, accessible, democratic and effective municipal elections; and to consulting them broadly, to ensure that we understand what they're asking for, and to bringing their concerns and amendments, positive and critical, to this House for proper debate. That's the whole idea of getting to second reading, getting to committee, so that we can have that back-and-forth and ensure that it's the best legislation going.

We do, however, have concerns that many of the important details of this bill, such as the details of ranked ballot elections, are in regulation and not subject to the parliamentary process. I believe that for something as fundamental as how people are going to vote, it is absolutely critical that it's done in this House, through the Legislature, and not by someone in a backroom writing a regulation that we have no ability—once they put it through and the minister signs off, it actually is the law. We need to have that debate.

We need to also ensure that there's public scrutiny of those types of things. That is open, participatory democracy at work. When we start taking that away, regardless of whether it's purposeful or inadvertent, we're doing a discredit to the people of Ontario. We've talked through a little bit, here this afternoon, why the population is not as engaged, why the voter turnout is down. It is things like that. When you take away their ability to participate, to have their voice heard, then you start to see apathy happening and people saying, “Ah, what the heck. I'm not coming back. I'm not going to go out and vote tonight, because what does it really matter?”

I think there's an opportunity always. Something as simplistic, but fundamental to democracy, as the vote—to change how you're going to vote in your system—has to be done in open quarters. You have to have debate, you have to have transparency and you have to allow the broader electorate to have their say.

The public consultation is absolutely critical on this bill. To have people not be able to have a say through a referendum on something as significant and fundamental as changing how you vote is absolutely—you just cannot allow that to happen. I can't even get the word out. It's unacceptable that we would not allow the people, who are going to be the most impacted by something as significant as a change to that, to have a full say.

Electoral reform belongs to the voter—not to one party, not to one group, not to special interests, but to all people to have that say. My colleague the member from Oxford pointed out to me, when we were chatting about this, that it's interesting that the government opposite will

allow a municipality to have a referendum on where a casino goes, but not for something as fundamental to our democracy as how we vote.

I want to extend this to the federal government in power currently. They're looking at changing the electoral system. I certainly appeal to them that they do the same thing, that they make it open to every voter of Canada before they make any change, particularly a one-sided one that only gets decided in their rooms, or a regulation like this government is proposing to do to make those changes.

There's a number of areas in this that I'm going to try to get through in just my short 20 minutes. Third-party advertising is a big piece of it. Under Bill 181, third-party advertisers have to register with the municipality, display their name and contact information on their signs, and be subject to contribution and spending limits. Campaign contribution restrictions, including municipal bylaws to prohibit contributions from trade unions and corporations, would also apply to third-party fundraising.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. I have introduced third-party advertising as my private member's bill. I just wanted to remind the people listening at home and who may read Hansard later that I did that back in October. My colleague Rick Nicholls did it back in 2013-14, and Ted Arnott did it back as far as 2011. So this has come up a number of times. My bill was there as recently as October 2015, and the Liberal government over there unanimously voted it down. It's interesting that they keep spinning that, "I want to take action. I want to jump to the floor and I want to change all of this because it's not right."

It's interesting that they just had their heritage dinner, their biggest fundraiser ever, and they didn't change anything just before that dinner. I just want to make sure that the people out there understand that this isn't something that they're just jumping through because it's the right thing to do; they truly got caught.

The other distinction is that we don't hand out contracts. They keep throwing it back that we accept fundraising money. You're right; we all accept fundraising money, but we don't sign contracts. We're not the government. There's a significant distinction there, Mr. Speaker.

Provincially, third parties don't have contribution and spending limits during writ periods, so it's interesting that a government that won't actually vote for my bill to limit some of those things is suggesting to municipalities, "You should do it and we're going to give you the power to do it." It's kind of one of those "do as I say but not as I do" quotes, if I can throw that out there.

The principle of ensuring that there are limits—and no one is trying to quash the ability for people to have their say, but there need to be limits. There needs to be fairness. My colleague Norm Miller from Parry Sound-Muskoka raised that earlier today: There need to be fair limits. As a politician who's going to run, I want to know that I have a fair playing field, that it's equal to all and that I'm not going to have some group out there that's

going to outspend me 25 to 1 and I can do nothing about that. That's significant.

Mr. Essensa, the Chief Electoral Officer—this is one of his top priorities. It has been in his last two reports. It's part of the reason why I brought it forward in my private member's bill, assuming that all parties would want to ensure that there's fairness and that democracy is actually what we put on the pedestal, that that's the thing that we're all here about—not self-serving interests, not clinging to power, but that we ensure that democracy and the ability for every single person to have a fair and equal opportunity to play a role is enshrined in our value system.

Having democracy where every single person has a free vote and free speech is absolutely fundamental and is one of the greatest privileges that those people who gave their lives and made the ultimate sacrifice ensured that we as Canadians and Ontarians have.

Mr. Essensa, too, has called on the government to make elections fair by capping third-party fundraising. I think his findings are important as they speak to the serious trouble brewing in our election process. Just look at the evidence, not from Bill Walker but Mr. Essensa, Chief Electoral Officer. In the 2007 election, third parties spent \$1.8 million. In the 2011 election, they spent \$6 million. In 2014, \$8.6 million—a jump of 400%, or a tripling, since 2007. Mr. Speaker, that's a significant amount of money, with no limitation there. That is just not fair in anyone's eyes. I don't think the general electorate out there would believe that that's fair to anyone, that there is unlimited spending. Putting caps on, like almost every province has—the federal government has. I'm not certain, again, why this party is so adamant unless there is really something, that they're saying, "Oh, that may impact me. I want to cling to power."

That's not right. Do the right thing for the people that you've been given the privilege and honour to come here to serve. I'm going to just repeat: They voted down all three of those bills that came forward, the premise being fairness and ensuring that all people play by the exact same ground rules, the same game, that the same rules apply to all. Why did they not? I think they have to answer to their constituents why they didn't and not play this, "We're just jumping in now and we're going to change the world because we just thought of it."

There is pressure put on. There are concerns being raised by the public, by the media, by the opposition. That is our job, by the way. When there are challenges in the system, when we think there is something not being done properly, that is our job on behalf of the people of Ontario: to stand up and challenge them and make them accountable.

We believe elections must be fair, where everyone gets a fair shot. Campaign contributions—a quick summary: The bill does not prevent campaign contributions from unions and corporations. It simply gives municipalities the authority to pass a bylaw restricting these contributions. Currently, donations of \$10 or less are not considered contributions. This bill increases that amount

to \$25. There's a new spending limit on holding parties and other expressions of appreciation after voting closes.

It's interesting that we're changing it from \$10 to \$25. For some people, \$10 could mean the world to them. That could be a big amount of money. I'm not certain where that one came from. We'll let that one come out in debate in committee.

1710

My challenge and recommendation to the government is to embrace our efforts, to ensure that people have their say in committee, as the minister has agreed to do. Open to ways to improve: If we bring good amendments through on behalf of the people, I believe—and I hope he is going to be sincere. Very similar to Bill 100; I've stood up in my riding on Bill 100, a government bill. I believe there are some really good things in there but there are two or three significant things that I've heard, particularly from the landowner associations in my riding. I have said to them, "You put your exact words and I'll walk that to the minister and I'll ensure that there's no saying that we didn't see it, we didn't hear it, and hold them"—the Deputy Premier suggested the other day in the House that she liked that I was actually supporting their bill. I said that was with a qualifier: I will do it with significant pieces. The easements and transferability of easements are the two main, key points.

If you're truly sincere and there's nothing to hide, you'll put it in explicit black-and-white writing in your document before it's ever voted on in this House. If they don't do that, then it raises suspicion of what they are perhaps trying to hide, or if they at least won't come right out and put it there, then there's a reason.

At that point, I've told the people in my riding who have called me on that—I have lots of people supporting me. They think it's a good piece of legislation. I have some user groups that are concerned about those two specifics and I put it back to trust of this government. You can't stand in this House and say, "Trust me. We'll do the right thing," and then not put those types of things into your bill. This is very similar.

I hope the party opposite, the Liberal Party, and their leadership will not be afraid of elections with limited third-party spending at the provincial level. If they're saying it's good enough for municipal folks, why would they not accept that for their own purposes? We keep hearing, "We're going to talk and we've sent out letters to the two leaders and we're going to do this." That's only lip service if you don't truly listen and put in what's best for Ontarians, not what's best for you and your collective organization or, in this case, political party.

Controlling expenditures does not limit influence, but it does let them run rampant if you don't control it. We have to have caps, again, that everyone is aware of. Everybody has the same game rules, everyone has the same significant ability to fundraise to the same level and to spend the same amount of money. Third parties that they actually have a connection to can unduly influence an election, and that terrifies me. For any of us, why we would give up a profession, a life, a career, to come and

serve—I believe it's one of the most honourable opportunities and professions in the world. To be able to serve the public is to me truly a noble calling, but you have to go into that knowing you're going to have a fair playing field so you can go and do your job that way.

Last Friday, our party leader and I released our caucus's six-point plan to clean up political financing in Ontario. In addition to calling for an immediate public inquiry, we were asking for the creation of a special select committee with equal representation from all parties that will take place in public with input from across the province. It can't be done by one party, regardless of political stripe, frankly. I'd be saying the same thing if it was us on that side of the House—so that the appearances are that everyone has the ability to have input.

Limits to third-party, special-interest advertising absolutely have a fundamental, key role. As I've said here numerous times already today, we need to ensure that we all can play on a fair and level playing field. A complete phase-out of union and corporate donations, an end to ministerial fundraising targets, and a strengthening of lobbying restrictions are all things, in the greater good, that will protect us.

Serious allegations have been raised in the media as to the conduct of this Liberal government and the perception is growing that it may have turned doing government business into a money-making machine for the Ontario Liberal Party. That's unfortunate but it is what's out there. It's what has been brought and, again, that discussion needs to be had and it needs to be resolved to the satisfaction of the general public. They need to be part of that to ensure, regardless of what has happened, that it can't continue going forward.

Ontarians have lost trust in you—I think that's part of why there's apathy—and we need to restore that. One of the ways is a gesture of goodwill and good faith to say, "We're open to an all-party select committee so we can all create the rules for everyone going forward."

Liberals don't want to talk about their past conduct. They'll only talk about changing the rules now, as I say, because they got caught. That's just the reality of the situation. A full investigation is required if we're going to get to this. The people of Ontario need to know the truth.

Ranked ballots: The bill gives municipalities the right to implement a ranked ballot system beginning with the next municipal elections in 2018. This bill includes very few details, leaving everything, including any regulation regarding public consultation, to a later date.

We are particularly concerned, as my good colleague from Oxford—who is very well versed in municipal politics, as are members like Perth-Wellington and a number of my colleagues who have served municipally and bring very factual, detailed experience to the table. My colleague from the NDP, Mr. Hatfield, has served municipally, and I enjoyed his context of what the debate is today.

But we're very concerned. I want to make it explicitly clear that no government should be making unilateral

changes to the system under which they will be getting elected—provincial, municipal and, I hope, at the end of the day, the federal government, because they're also considering significant changes to our electoral process and our electoral system. They need to ensure that every single Canadian and, in our case, every single Ontarian has the ability to have their fair say and ensure that they, at the end of the day, have their vote that they believe counts. Because if we don't—I agree here, again, with the Minister of Natural Resources—engage them and they don't believe they are part of the process, we'll find those numbers going even lower. I hope that doesn't happen. We can do much better to ensure that everyone is part of it.

The Premier said, in no uncertain terms, that she would not be making changes without consulting first. I've got a quote from 2014. Kathleen Wynne said, "We were the party that opened the discussion and put the referendum on the ballot. So, I think it is clear that we are open to having these discussions."

Even a past Liberal minister, Jim Watson, who served as Minister of Municipal Affairs from 2007 to 2010 and is now the mayor of Ottawa, said that he didn't approve of this change. Just last week, he was quoted as saying, "When I go into the ballot box I vote for my first choice, and I want my first choice to win, not my second or third choice." Another quote: "I don't believe the vast majority of people, when they go into a balloting station, want to go and water down their vote by voting for their second or third choice on the ballot."

Listen to what the current Minister of Municipal Affairs said on the lack of a referendum requirement: "Under Municipal Act any municipality can hold a referendum on any issue. Some may choose this route. So be it." We think local democracy needs more protection than "So be it."

I wish he would support the same principle, as I said in this House a little bit earlier—and, yes, it was a bit of a shout-out, perhaps, while he was talking—and his cabinet colleagues, specifically the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Energy: to do the same thing for the Green Energy Act and allow municipalities to have a referendum in regard to putting in wind turbines, being willing or non-willing hosts, and not forcing them, particularly those who come out with a majority of their residents, the people who are actually going to be impacted, saying, "We're a non-willing host." And yet you're going to put those in their communities.

Again, I challenge the minister. You can't have double standards. You can't pick and choose when you're going to allow the people to have their choice, when it's something as significant as wind turbines or a municipal referendum. He said that they can choose it. Mr. Speaker, they have to stand and walk the talk.

I wanted to just get it on record that last summer Grey county, one of my great counties, passed a motion to not support the change. In my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Grey county, which represents nine municipalities, considered and rejected this change. So there's a significant number of people.

The city of Toronto, in October 2015, passed a resolution recommending that the province not proceed with an amendment to the Municipal Elections Act to provide for ranked choice voting.

Mr. Speaker, I want to finish where I began, and that is that we truly have to respect and honour democracy. We have to truly respect and honour the people who need to participate, if we're going to truly honour those that gave up their lives to allow us freedom of speech and freedom of vote. We need to ensure that electoral reform does belong to the voters, and that the voter will have the final say.

The minister has said that he's open to ways to improve. If the people loudly say, "We want a referendum before you make any changes to any kind of a voting system," I challenge him to be that honest and sincere minister who will actually do the right thing, do the honourable thing and ensure that the people of Ontario are the ones who own democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions or comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always a pleasure to follow my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. He brings great passion every time he stands up in the House. Today, he's talking about respecting and honouring democracy, and about the way we could be changing the way we vote. He sees it as a fundamental change in democracy. I would hope that we could travel this bill to get more people to have a say.

Speaker, I don't consider myself an apologist for the minister in any way, but I would say to my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound that the wording in this bill does allow your municipality or any municipality in the province to hold a referendum should they so choose and ask the members of their municipality directly, "Do you want to adopt this change in the way we do our voting? And if so, we'll do it in our subsequent election in 2022."

1720

We do have the ability within this bill to ask our municipalities if they want to go to a direct vote of the people, or they can do public consultation or whatever to get a feel in each and every one of our municipalities to see if ranked balloting is the way we choose to go. I don't think a lot of people are going to go that way. I could be proven wrong, but it is an option out there for the municipalities.

I believe it's the same thing, that they could determine a ban on corporate and union financing for municipal candidates. Individual municipalities have that ability to hold their own referendum on whether this is the way they want to do it for themselves, whatever works in their community. We used to call it a Windsor solution, a made-in-Windsor solution, but it doesn't have to be imposed by the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his comments, but, again, when I spoke a little while ago for eight or 10 minutes on

this, I talked about the fundraising issue. The member spoke about this for quite a while in his 20 minutes and I must say I do take some offence.

I spoke about how the rules are the same for everyone on fundraising and that nobody in either opposition party raised this issue until two, four or six weeks ago. The member then would say back, however, "That's okay because we don't award contracts. The government awards the contracts." The inference is, of course, that people are buying influence. So it is offensive, and I guess it's okay that because we're government, then the rules would apply to us differently than they would apply to them.

I would say also to the member, I would ask him to consider this: If the implication is that the fundraising rules are not good enough because we're in government, that they'd be good enough for you because you are—what about when we were in a minority government position in the Legislature? What about when, combined, the Conservatives and the NDP together as two caucuses had more votes than the Liberals did in 2011? We were the government still, but combined you had more votes. What about when you walked into committee? What about when private members' bills were introduced into the Legislature? What about when the legislative agenda was being debated?

I could make the same inference back to you, that on a case-by-case, issue-by-issue basis the Conservative and NDP caucuses would get together, they'd have a discussion and they would decide, "You know what? This isn't good enough," but remembering that while you're having those discussions, the same fundraising rules are applying to you. You could make the case very strongly, I would say, that in committees, on private members' bills and on the legislative agenda, you were able to provide that same level of influence, if I was so inclined to provide that inference, but I won't. I would just measure it and lay it out there for perhaps others to give some consideration to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to add some comments to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I wanted to just read into the record some of the requests that a great group who came to my office last week talked to me about. It was Campaign Fairness. It was a great meeting by some young people and they had specific requests regarding changes to the Municipal Elections Act:

(1) Ban corporate and union contributions to municipal election campaigns; encourage support from individuals by requiring contribution rebate programs;

(2) Limit contributions from any one person to \$3,000 total, for any number of candidates in the same municipality;

(3) Include external campaign labour under employer's contributions; include time worked on a campaign by a paid employee as part of an employer's contribution and subject to the normal limits;

(4) Improve regulation and oversight by including a section in the Municipal Elections Act that gives the municipal clerk's office the responsibility to review candidate financial statements for completeness, and require revisions if improperly filed.

It was a great meeting. They put a lot of thought into this. I know the minister has probably met with them a number of times as well. They were in the House earlier on and I really wanted to get that into the record because they put a lot of thought into this legislation, and they provided good feedback to all members in this House. I do hope that the minister takes some of the things that they talked about under consideration to make it into this bill. There are a lot of these that I do support and hope to see in the final piece of legislation, in the final law. We know, from the provincial level and the federal level, that we need to clean up the corporate and union contributions, first and foremost. I agree with a lot of the things that Campaign Fairness said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound feels very strongly about this issue as it relates to Bill 181. I have to say we agree with a lot of the comments around third-party advertising, around corporate and union donations.

I just want to say—I want to emphasize this—that process does matter. It matters, because when you follow a thorough, transparent and accountable process, you get a very good response.

Quite honestly, there are some questions and some trust issues around this government and the manner in which they develop policy, the way that they develop legislation. Quite honestly, you can't blame us for having some outstanding questions, going forward, around how this legislation will look. Will it accomplish its goals of strengthening democracy? Who will it benefit? These are still outstanding questions. The bill was only tabled a week ago.

The leader of the NDP and the leader of the PC Party just met with the Premier, half an hour ago or 45 minutes ago. The premise of that meeting was, "We're going to sit down and we're going to talk about this fundraising issue. We're going to talk about an open process." No sooner had those two leaders left that meeting than the Premier released her recommendations on how fundraising rules are going to be developed in the province of Ontario. So you cannot blame us for having some outstanding questions as to how this is going to be developed.

Quite honestly, the questions that came out last week around, in particular—one news thing was that seven renewable energy companies donated \$255,000 to the Liberal Party, and then those very same companies benefited from government contracts.

Those are outstanding questions that need to be answered in an open and transparent manner.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound can now reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to thank the members.

The member from Windsor–Tecumseh: I always enjoy his comments. What I was really getting at—and he did point to a piece of clarification, that they can have some referendum ideas, but at the end of the day, there's still a lot of this written in regulation. It's not in this House; it's not in front of the people. You can have discussions in public and say it's public consultation, but how much does the public really understand of the matter? I still have big concerns about that.

The Minister of Natural Resources brought a lot of things in here. I have great respect for him. But he says no one brought up this idea. Well, if there was nothing wrong, why, all of a sudden, is the Premier in such a hurry to fix it and have a meeting?

I'm just learning now that she has already put out a press release, 15 or 20 minutes, maybe half an hour, after the initial discussion. You would think you might want to go back and reflect and actually have a bit more in-depth conversations with people.

He used the word “inference” a lot. What were people inferring? I'm hearing from people in my riding that they're inferring—and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo just brought up the word “trust.” There are a lot of people who have concerns with the trust. When issues like fundraising come up, it's very challenging, if they're not prepared to step up and really have the conversation, to have that level of trust.

They had their heritage dinner, the biggest fundraiser they've ever had, and then all of a sudden, they wanted to rush and review and revisit fundraising rules. If there was nothing wrong, what's the big rush all of a sudden, just because we inferred that there might be some wrongdoing going on?

Lambton–Kent–Middlesex brought up a good point. To Campaign Fairness—any group that is working to ensure that democracy is alive and respected and well in our province—I applaud them and I thank them for doing their democratic duty.

At the end of the day—I've said it here a number of times—electoral reform belongs to the voter. For any level of government that is going to change any significant way that we're going to vote, that people are going to have access to democracy, it has to be done by referendum and a full and comprehensive process, to ensure they own democracy.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for further debate, I'm going to remind members on all sides of the House that we are, in fact, debating Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts. We're not debating what might have happened at the meeting this afternoon; we're not re-debating what took place at question period concerning provincial fundraising. We're talking about Bill 181, and I would ask all members to make their comments relevant to Bill 181. Please.

Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's good to have an opportunity to get up and speak about Bill 181. In reference to keeping our remarks to the bill, anytime we're talking about trust and respect in the Legislature as they relate to democracy, I don't think that that's actually going too far.

As some of the members raised those issues today, it became clear to me that trust is a two-way street. The member who just spoke, from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, for example, talked about government funding announcements and how members routinely are not invited at all, or at the last minute, to attend events. That doesn't actually create really good trust between members of the opposition parties and members on the government side.

I've experienced that myself. In my own riding during the Pan Am Games, where we spent billions of dollars, there was a huge announcement for a \$10-million building. I had been the mayor of the city, I had been responsible, in part, for the creation of the Welland Recreational Canal Corp., and I was not invited to the event. When I attended the event in my riding, people were saying, “Why aren't you up on the stage making a speech about this great thing that's going to be happening here in our community?” I said, “I wasn't invited.” I'm down here with my constituents, right? I'm doing the right thing. So I think trust is a two-way street. We need to get better about doing that, because it is taxpayers' dollars at the end of the day.

This is an important bill, and I know that a review of the Municipal Act happens on a regular basis after municipal elections. I've got about a 20-year span where I was involved in municipal politics: as a city councillor, as the mayor and as a regional councillor in my community. I ran six elections in my own community over the years.

There are certainly some good pieces to this bill. I haven't had an opportunity to read all 65 pages of it as yet—maybe it will be some bedtime reading over the next couple of weeks—but I have to agree with many people who have actually spoken to this bill today to say that, yes, although the government did announce that they were going out to consult on the Municipal Act one year ago, they only tabled it a few days ago. It is a big piece of legislation. Really, they should have given some more time between when they tabled it to when we're actually debating it to give all of us the opportunity to go back and talk to our colleagues and our caucus, to talk to perhaps some legal experts and to talk to our stakeholders. We sometimes share stakeholders, but in many instances we have different stakeholders that have interests in these kinds of issues.

I think that once again, this bill is going to get pushed through. Certainly in this session, we've had a huge history of that being followed by time allocation. We've heard from the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he's open and transparent about hearing what we have to say about the bill, or if we have any changes, he certainly wants to hear about them. But we know just recently—and I think this may partially fall under his portfolio as

well; I spoke to it briefly last week in a questions-and-comments section, where during the budget bill process—and the member from Kitchener–Waterloo was there—the NDP had nine or 10 amendments which would have improved accessibility for those people with sight and hearing issues by improving the communication available on that particular piece of legislation. The government, in that case, voted against every one of those nine or 10—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It was 11.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —11 amendments. The government voted against all of those amendments, which would have allowed improved access for probably more than a million people with disabilities in this province in a way that would have provided them with easier access to the bill. So when you hear that the government is open to perhaps hearing about these amendments to the bill, then you go into committee and they vote down every one of those amendments, it doesn't give you much trust. Would you agree?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I would.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes. Instead, they just voted down those things and they refused to do anything for the kind of disabled community in that regard.

Now, we support some sections of this bill that will strengthen local democracy and that will get the influence of big money out of election campaigns. However, I don't think that we're going to have enough time in this process to hear from all the proponents. This is a bill that could have been travelled and probably should be travelled to the Far North, the northwest, the northeast and the southwest to hear from folks, because many of our municipal councils won't have the opportunity to actually make it here to Toronto to have a say in what they want to do. This government has not had the best track record when it comes to giving opposition parties, as well as government members, the opportunity to go out, travel bills and hear from people the legislation impacts.

We're going to take a close look at the bill over the next few days. I hope we have time to come back with some amendments that would generally improve it.

The bill seeks to make several changes. There was a lot of discussion today about changing the period of time from January to May. I think the member from Windsor–Tecumseh spoke about how you can still go out and actually canvass; you just can't spend money doing it. So changing that date can advantage or disadvantage.

I've been in both of those situations, where I've been the incumbent. It can be a disadvantage because while you're still the mayor in a full-time job and a regional councillor in a part-time job, there isn't much opportunity for you to go out and canvass. Yes, you might be out at some council meetings and you might be on TV, but you certainly don't have time to go and do door-to-door things and canvass, while your opposition, who has registered in January, may have lots of time, depending on the kind of work he or she is doing, to go out and knock on every door in your city or town.

Then there's the issue of financing of those campaigns. I can tell you that in my area, I've seen people spend upwards of \$40,000 to \$50,000 to run in a regional seat for a job that actually pays \$30,000 a year. So, lots of money from developers—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Trustees, as well.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Trustees, as well—and city councillors. I've seen people run right alongside of them and only spend \$3,000. Certainly you can buy a campaign if you have enough money to do a lot of advertising, a lot of signage, a lot of newspaper ads.

The piece about endorsements: 25 eligible voters must endorse the nomination of a candidate for office. That happens now in provincial and federal elections. I don't see it as a barrier. Surely you've got 25 friends who will sign your nomination papers.

Mr. John Vanthof: Speak for yourself.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I don't think that is too onerous.

The eligibility to vote: Now, there's this piece about regulations governing who is and who isn't a tenant. For me, I would need some clarity around that before I could support it. Do you have to be a paying tenant or not? Are you just couch surfing because you're homeless? Is it a family member or a friend, who is like a non-paying tenant? Who is going to determine what that definition of eligibility actually is for a tenant?

1740

Ranked ballots: Certainly, this issue has been before us in the past—probably about two years ago now. In some of the larger cities, this may be a big issue for people. In Toronto, certainly, there was a lot of lobbying done back in, I think, 2014. In other areas of the province, it may not be much of an issue. Using an example of a by-election a couple of weeks ago in Hamilton where there were 22 candidates for one ward in a municipal election for a city council job: How many choices would you have to make in those kinds of situations to actually come up with somebody who got 50% plus one of the vote when the vote is split 22 ways? So I think it's something that probably needs some consideration during by-elections.

Advertising by candidates: Candidates are required to identify themselves on their election campaign advertisements. I would say that's probably the norm in any event.

I want to make clear to people who are watching on TV here today or who are here today—they may be here today just because they support the ranked balloting piece—this is a big bill and it has nine or 10 areas of change. It's kind of like an omnibus bill in some ways. Often, the government brings these things together in a way that wedges the opposition parties so that they can actually support some of the bill but they can't support other pieces of the bill. I hope that the minister is being genuine when he says that he's prepared to be open and to hear about some, perhaps, good amendments to the bill and that those amendments—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: As long as you can convince us.

Ms. Cindy Forster: That's very hard to do, Minister—that the amendments will actually, perhaps, pass at the end of the day, which is not the norm.

I understand that municipalities are given the option to ban corporate or union donations. Then there's this whole piece about linking the right to campaign for an issue to the right to make campaign donations. I don't quite understand that. Bill 181 could deter municipalities from banning corporate and union donations because that would force municipalities to actually silence non-government organizations, charities and community groups at the same time, not to mention the corporate and union—

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Unions and corporations couldn't become third-party advertisers.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I get that.

The federal government as well as several provinces currently restrict third-party advertising in order to limit the influence of big money. However, my understanding is that Bill 181 differs from such legislation in significant ways. As it's written, it would seem that Bill 181 would have a chilling or silencing effect on non-government organizations, charities and community groups during the six-month municipal election period.

My read of the bill—and I may be wrong because I haven't been able to speak to the researchers or the experts yet, but I would think that that would be the time that people want to be lobbying their municipal governments and their regional governments to get their issues moved forward because they haven't been able to do it with the last elected council.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: They could do that; they would just have to register.

Ms. Cindy Forster: As written, Bill 181 seems to place serious restrictions on these groups to advocate during an election period, unless they register. With so little time to have analyzed this bill—

Interjection.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Speaker, the minister seems to want to answer. Maybe we'll have a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay; obviously I have to ask the minister to come to order. The member from Welland has the floor and needs to be given the opportunity to present her remarks uninterrupted. I need to hear them.

The member from Welland has the floor.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Hopefully the government can explain or provide clarity on this piece during debate, during their turn. If not, I'm sure that we will hear all of the perhaps negative aspects of this bill when we get to committee in the coming days and weeks.

I understand that there's a Supreme Court decision under way on this very issue out of British Columbia, and I understand that the Attorney General has now just weighed in and asked for intervenor status, which seems to be quite—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I think I was up a minute ago asking the Minister of Municipal Affairs

not to interrupt the member for Welland. I think I was. I would say once again, in case he didn't hear, the member for Welland has the floor.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker.

It's quite interesting that the Attorney General would be weighing in on this case at this point in time. What's even more interesting is that this is before us while there is actually a Supreme Court of Canada decision in the works. Why this is even in this bill at this point in time—or why is there such a rush on this bill having known that, in fact, there is a Supreme Court of Canada ruling perhaps about to come down some time in the next couple of months? While we certainly agree with the broader strokes of removing big money out of our local democracy, we need to ensure that we have a more open and transparent electoral process.

I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about some of the things that I experienced provincially, but also that would apply locally. I think they happen in municipal elections as well.

The location of polling stations and the access to those: I can tell you, during the last federal and the last provincial campaigns in my riding, the returning office was far out of the city—and I live in the biggest city in my municipality—and not on a bus route or anywhere near where anybody could actually go to vote every day during the open voting period. Some of the polling stations—in fact, many of them—were not on transportation routes. They were on secondary highways going through the city. A lot of people—seniors with walkers—were unable to even access that particular polling station without a drive. It becomes problematic because it really does suppress voter turnout based on the election.

I also heard from constituents during both of those elections that they could live on Smith Street—and the polling station was on Smith Street—but they fell in a polling station that was as much as four kilometres from their home. They could have walked to the polling station, but the way that it was divided up, they actually had to either get a ride or get on a bus to go and do that.

The things that I think are missing in this bill, that I've seen for the little bit that I've had to read—the issue of permanent residence. There are many people who live in this province. Some of them we meet who have been in this country for 30 or 40 years. They're not Canadian citizens, but they're permanent residents. There's nothing to address their right to vote, even though they've been great contributors to their communities. Municipal government directly impacts them in every way. It isn't addressed in this bill, and I think it's something that the government should really be taking a look at.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: They own homes and pay taxes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: They pay taxes; that's right. They volunteer in their community. They do the food program in their schools. I think that's an issue that needs to be addressed.

The issue of enumerations—the voting lists are so outdated. The turnover in rental units and large apartment buildings—particularly in larger cities, the turnover is

once every 18 months to two years. That information is always out of date, and it's very difficult for people who are running in elections to go out and make contact with people.

The third piece that comes to mind from the last municipal election that I was involved in was the fact that the government and the legislation aren't very good about communicating with apartment building owners and managers about access during municipal elections. In fact, in the last municipal election that I ran in, I had the police called on me. It was 7 o'clock one evening, and the manager of the building had no idea that, under a municipal election, you had the right to go in and canvass that building. When I informed her of that decision—I think I was with someone else who was running for city council—they called the police, and the police came to the building and told me that I had to leave until this was sorted out. So I think we need to do a better job of making sure that everyone is aware of access rights for people who are participating in any election at any level.

1750

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm glad that we are back on track, discussing Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

The member for Welland raised the issue of consultation with stakeholders on Bill 181. Perhaps she's unaware of the fact that we did consult with 3,400 people—submissions were received—on how the act can be received. We received this from the public, municipal councils and staff from across the province as part of the consultation process on this.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have reached out to my own municipal stakeholders in my riding of Kitchener Centre, and we had a very good discussion on this. They appreciated that we are doing this well in advance of the 2018 municipal elections to give them sufficient time to prepare for their next election cycle.

On the issue of ranked ballots: This is an option that many local officials have asked for. We see voter turnout in all elections dropping, and we're looking at a number of ideas to try to reverse this trend. In the years that I worked as a journalist, whether I was covering federal, provincial or local elections, this was an ongoing issue: the fact that we see fewer and fewer people who are turning out to vote in elections. Of course, we're always looking for ideas on how to encourage greater voter turnout.

Mr. Speaker, the overall goal is to try to ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are clear and reflect how modern campaigns and elections are run. The bill is going to ensure greater transparency and accountability, and it's going to give voters more choices.

I know that people in my riding of Kitchener Centre are certainly going to be looking at how we're going to be debating and voting on this particular bill.

We also want to recognize that many of our front-line services are provided at the local level, and we want to ensure that Ontario is well served by people who are governing us at the municipal level.

I encourage my colleagues to support Bill 181, as I will.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak to this bill. It's such a simple question. It's the fundamental question about the value of democracy, the history of democracy, which is the foundation of everything good about this country and, indeed, this very place: Queen's Park, the Legislative Assembly.

If you look back to the history of democracy, which, as Winston Churchill said, is a terrible form of government; it just happens to be better than all the rest—and it is the very best. It can be sloppy and it can be messy, but every four years or every two years or whatever the voting time period is, people get to choose, with their vote—that wonderful, most powerful tool that the common man has—the people who would represent him or her at whatever level of government they get to vote on. So in spite of the fact that we do experience some apathy in politics on voting day here in Ontario and in most of the western nations, it is still the most powerful and valuable tool we have. Anybody who comes to Canada, as a Canadian, to enjoy the wonderful things that we have—our freedom and our democracy and our Constitution and our rule of law—understands the power of the vote, and they exercise their right. They know how to play the game, and they understand that they have that wonderful right to cast their vote here and determine who represents them and how our country is run.

The idea that we would play with that basic, important, historic, wonderful strength of democracy and the vote and just change it with a bill in the hands of a few versus giving people the right and the vote to choose, through referendum, how they are governed and how they will conduct this wonderful business of electing the people that represent them—it should be by referendum. It should be restored to the people to choose how they're represented.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My friend the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane and I were just chattering away, and we've heard so much this afternoon about the Attorney General of Ontario filing for intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada to comment on the case from British Columbia on third-party advertising. We're curious, and I hope the Liberals will take this opportunity in their two-minute hit to explain why Ontario is now jumping into the Supreme Court case involving British Columbia and third-party advertising. We're hoping—this is a perfect opportunity—that we would hear from the government to clear up any misunderstanding. The Attorney General is here. We would love to know the answer to that: why, all of a sudden, we have just applied

for intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada on the BC case involving third-party advertising in elections. This is a big part of Bill 181, and inquiring minds would like to know. So I hope we can hear that answer.

I just want to follow up a bit on what the member from Welland just said about non-citizens not being given the right to vote in this change to the act. We know they come, they buy huge homes, they pay property taxes—they're paying taxes in Ontario. At the municipal level, they get involved in community groups, community associations, schools and parent councils, but they're not given the right to vote. Many municipal politicians think that that would help them, because there are so many people where you go and knock on their door and they say, "Oh, sorry. I'm a non-resident. I don't have the right to vote," even though they're paying the same taxes as everybody else. That could have been addressed in this bill; it hasn't been addressed in this bill, and that is a weakness in this bill.

But we would like to hear from the Attorney General at this time, if we could, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Welland.

I would like to say to the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, on behalf of the Attorney General: Thank you very much for the hint on your lead question tomorrow. We very much appreciate it. I'm sure, at 10:30 tomorrow morning, you'll be able to get an answer to that question, so you'll just have to stay tuned.

I really do appreciate the comments from the member from Welland and her general support of the bill. I share her concerns about polling stations and accessibility plans during elections. This piece of legislation will help to make that better. Is it going to fix it all? No, but it will make it better. I think it's important, if we want to engage people in campaigns, that we make it easy for them to vote and not send them four kilometres down the street or to a place with a set of stairs that has no way for them to get up. I think we have to go to people as well and have some provisions for that.

We're not going to talk about campaign financing as it relates to the question period today, because the Speaker has already told me not to do that, so I'm going to scratch that off the list. But just to clarify, it's a question of registering as a third party, and in those municipalities that don't accept corporate and union donations, corporations and unions can't be third parties.

I do want to add one more comment as to the member not being invited to an announcement. I want to let her know that the members that I know on this side of the House do what they can. I know that when I went to Windsor, I let all the members from Windsor know—

Interjection: No, no. That's not how it happens.

Mr. John Fraser: Let me finish what I'm saying. Don't assume there's a motive or impugn a motive. I'm not saying there never is, but what I'm saying is that often things happen—they happen on this side of the House. I went to the riding of the member from Kingston and the Islands and I didn't let her know. I didn't let the member from Niagara know. It happens. It shouldn't, but please don't attach a motive to it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

The member for Welland now has two minutes to reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to thank the members from Kitchener Centre, Carleton—Mississippi Mills, Windsor—Tecumseh, Ottawa South, and even the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for his heckling.

Now, I am sure—back to the member from Ottawa South—if we asked a question about that this week, the answer would be the normal "This is a legal issue before the courts, so I am unable to respond." Right?

There was one other issue that I wanted to raise, and I ran out of time: the issue of enforcement-compliant audit committees. There is nothing currently under the act that does anything to support people who run who are wrongly accused of not spending enough for the campaign that they put on.

Recently in the riding beside me, in St. Catharines, in the municipal election, there was a vexatious and frivolous complaint by someone who actually had worked for the Liberal candidate—the Liberal candidate won—and complained voraciously to this committee. There was no substance to the complaint; there were no penalties to the person making the complaints, at the end of the day. But the candidate had to go out and hire a lawyer. It probably cost him \$20,000 in legal fees, at the end of the day. There is nothing to prevent people from doing that. Maybe there needs to be some sort of process that actually deals with vexatious and frivolous issues around campaigns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1801.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
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Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
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No. 159

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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 12 April 2016

Mardi 12 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 12 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 12 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 11, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? Minister of Natural Resources—Minister of Northern Development and Mines. My apologies.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I once was Minister of Natural Resources. It was a great portfolio and I enjoyed every second in it, but I am obviously delighted to be Minister of Northern Development and Mines right now.

I'm very pleased to continue debate on Bill 181. I'll be sharing my time with the minister responsible for seniors affairs. We're grateful to have an opportunity to carry on the debate that—

Applause.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Yes, indeed. Let's applaud Minister Sergio.

We're very pleased to be able to continue debate on Bill 181, an important piece of legislation, I think. Second reading debate was led off yesterday by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who has worked very, very hard to put together a piece of legislation that will be bringing forward changes to the Municipal Elections Act.

I think, in an overall sense, the goal is to ensure that the rules governing how municipal leaders are elected are clear and reflect, perhaps, how we can better run modern campaigns and elections. The ministry actually reviews the Municipal Elections Act following each municipal election. The goal is to ensure that the act does meet the changing needs of Ontario communities.

I recall part of Minister McMeekin's comments yesterday, that over 3,400 submissions about how the act could be improved were received from the public, from municipal councils and from staff across the province as part of the consultation last year.

The purpose in us bringing forward this legislation now is that we want to do it well in advance of the next municipal elections, in 2018, to allow our municipal partners sufficient time to prepare for the next election cycle in their communities.

I don't think I need to speak to anyone in the Legislature about the important services that are provided by our municipalities. Many people in the Legislature are former members of municipal councils, and certainly all of us work closely with the municipalities we represent to ensure that we are indeed reflecting their views. Certainly my goal as an MPP is to work with the municipal councils I represent: the city of Thunder Bay and many other municipalities in the riding of Thunder Bay—Superior North. One thing that I think we have all come to truly recognize is that municipal governments are the governments that are closest to the people; they are the ones that are going to be hearing directly from their constituents. We, of course, operate on very much the same basis. Certainly we have a very close relationship with our constituents.

The bottom line is that our communities certainly need to be strong. They need to be vibrant places where people can live, work and raise families. That's why I think it is important that we need to ensure that local elections are as efficient as possible. One of the ways I think we can do that—and that's reflected in this legislation—is by increasing transparency and accountability, and allowing more choice in municipal elections. That is very much part of the government's plan to build our province up.

One part of the legislation that is certainly of most interest to municipal leaders—and, I think, to people across the province—is ranked ballots. What we are working on to try to improve, at a time when voter turnout is going down in many communities—that has certainly been the case in municipal elections—is that we think it is timely to look at ideas that could potentially, and we believe will, reverse that trend.

What we are proposing is providing municipalities with an option. The option is to introduce ranked-ballot voting in their communities, if they so choose. I can certainly speak on behalf of those who have spoken to me about ranked ballots. The proponents of ranked ballots certainly believe that this method of voting can make election campaigns more civil; I think that is probably the

case. Jurisdictions that are using ranked ballots have seen better engagement and better debate, and certainly the evidence is that they're seeing higher turnouts. So that is one of the main aspects of it.

There's also a piece of the legislation related to campaign finance. If this legislation is passed—and we're obviously looking forward to a full debate—these changes will certainly help ensure that campaign finance rules are clear, are simple to follow, are easier to enforce and increase transparency and accountability in municipal elections.

What we are proposing, Mr. Speaker, is a framework to regulate third-party advertising to increase accountability for advertisers and ensure more fair and more transparent support, including setting contribution and spending limits. I believe that any discussion about modern elections must include whether we ban corporate and union donations, and these changes would give municipalities this option. Again, we want to make sure that our municipalities, our cities and our towns have the opportunity to undertake this conversation with their citizens, and that's very much the goal of this legislation.

We are proposing, for example, that clerks refund nomination fees to candidates only if they file their financial statements by the deadline. This way, candidates would be more than encouraged to file on time. There's an issue related to municipal elections, which we all speak about frequently, in terms of the actual campaign period. Right now, Ontario has the longest nomination period of any province. It probably is not a stretch to say that it contributes to campaign fatigue among candidates and voters. If this legislation is passed, candidates would be able to register between May 1 and the fourth Friday in July instead of from January 1 to the second Friday in September in the year of the election. We think that is a way we could actually reduce the impact of campaign fatigue—change the way that things are set up now, in terms of the election period that is in place.

There is also a goal to make sure we make elections more accessible for everyone. Our proposed changes would certainly require clerks to prepare accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could affect voters and candidates with disabilities. We would be asking for the municipalities to make the plan available to the public prior to voting day.

0910

I'll be passing it off to my colleague shortly, but I want to also make a few more comments about the voters list itself. We are also proposing improvements to the voters list. We need to make it easier for voters to add their name to the list or make changes to their information, as well as to make it easier for clerks to remove the names of deceased voters or deceased electors from the list.

This is very much a reflection of a very significant consultation that was undertaken by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. As I referenced earlier, Minister McMeekin informed us that there had been over 3,400 submissions that came forward in relation to what

changes may be put in place. We want to be able to give the municipalities the option to look at the ranked ballot system, one that has been a great discussion among many municipal leaders, and that is certainly the purpose of this legislation. I'm delighted to have had a chance to speak in support of this legislation and will at this point pass it off to my colleague the minister responsible for seniors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now turn debate over to the minister responsible for seniors.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you. You look good in the chair.

It's delightful to have a few minutes to speak on Bill 181, the so-called Municipal Elections Modernization Act. This is the second reading we are doing on this bill. It still has some time to go. Let me say first that I have to congratulate Minister McMeekin, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, for spending considerable time on this particular item. He has been consulting with various stakeholders, and I'm very pleased that it's in the House.

I believe citizens at large have been asking for some changes, some improvements to the Municipal Act; in other words, how municipal elections are taking place in our province. I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that we have hundreds of municipalities and cities, and some of the laws vary within some of the existing municipalities as well. I think the changes that have been proposed are welcome. I would like to say at the outset that I will support the recommendations the minister has made. We'll see how far we can get on it, how quickly we can move it.

The proposal is to see that this recommendation will be delivered to the local municipalities to implement if they so wish. It's only an option. They have the option to either implement this recommendation or change it and make further amendments. But I believe it's important, as Minister McMeekin has recommended, that we direct local municipalities to look at changes in how local municipalities conduct elections.

I have to tell you, Speaker, that this is very important. I come from a municipal background, and we always say that we are closer to the people when we deal with day-to-day issues. Who can say no to the people when they say, "This has really impinged on the way I live my life." If it's a sidewalk issue, if it's to make sure that when you open the tap that the water is running, that the lights are on, that the services are there—it's so important. Speaker, I don't have to tell you, I'm sure, that every member in the House receives calls from people not knowing what is municipal, provincial or federal. I have to say that 60% of the calls I get are municipal issues. So this shows how important it is that our people understand what belongs to them locally, federally or provincially. When people come in to our office, we do listen. We're trying to help them as well.

It's so important that we send this direction to the local municipalities for possible changes, because there are areas that need serious improvement. I was pleased to

hear the Minister of Northern Development and Mines addressing some of the issues and the proposed recommendations. One of them that we've been debating for a long time—and there are people who are really passionate about it—is ranked ballots. It's not confusing, but until it's there and it's done, people won't get used to it. It needs some explanation, yes, and it's one of the ways of electing our local politicians. Whether the cities or municipalities go along with this recommendation is another matter, but at least we are saying, "Let's do it more democratically and more transparently. Let's give the people more opportunities." I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that voters, especially at the municipal level, are not so affluent. We see 27%, 30%—very low turnouts in municipal campaigns.

We need to clean up several issues in every election, but especially municipal campaigns. This would perhaps help increase the turnout at the polls. Ranked ballots are one issue, campaign financing is another, increasing transparency and accountability is another, and banning corporate and union donations is another. Filing returns from candidates has been a big issue. It's sometimes very difficult for local clerks to deal with, because candidates—it's not that they're caught in bureaucratic paperwork or whatever it may be, but I think we have to send a clear message that the clerks are responsible for doing that particular work. Then the clerks will have to report as well.

The campaign period has been something that I have always been—let's say politely—not very happy about. Because when January 1 comes and the election is in October or November, it's like the world stops and everybody is thinking about trying to get re-elected from January all the way to October or November. What happens in between? Why such a long period of time for someone to get organized and put up signs or whatever? In other words, work practically stops, and it shouldn't. It doesn't. We always have staff and professional people in the various departments—public works, transportation or whatever—that they look after. But taxpayers feel, "Why do you need from January 1 to November to run the campaign?" This is an area that I believe municipalities will have to address, and I hope they will.

Now, I have a bit more to say, because I spent 18 years at the municipal level. I would say that I know how municipal campaigns are run and what taxpayers expect, and rightly so. One of the important issues at the polls on election day is accessibility: finding polls in the proper location, not 10 blocks away, disenfranchising people.

My time is up, unfortunately, but, as I said, I come from a municipal government; I spent some 18 years there. I hope that some of these recommendations will have some legs, that we go with second reading and let the municipalities decide how they can better improve municipal elections and municipal campaigns. I thank you for the time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure for me to provide a couple minutes of questions and comments on Bill 181.

I listened to the ministers' speeches this morning. I don't disagree with the way that they're marketing this bill, and I'll tell you why. When I ran for mayor, I waited till the last hour when nominations closed—and I suggest there are many members of this House who may have done the same—which made it about a month-long campaign period. The writ would have been a month, back in the day when I did that.

0920

So when the government talks about the writ, the registration period—and I'm also going to talk about the lame duck period—I think it's interesting to note that they have made the writ a lot longer under this bill, because the writ will now, in this bill, begin in July. The municipal election will be from July to the election date. I suggest that might be problematic for some people who are considering whether to run. I think it might do the reverse: It might deter people from running for office.

Yes, they have decreased the deadline down, from January 1 to May 1, but there's one thing that they've missed, and many municipalities have talked about this. It's the lame duck period. For example, when I was elected mayor, the election date was on November 8. We took office on December 1. It was just a little over three weeks. This now again, like the last election, pushes it out so that municipal staff would basically run the municipality for almost six weeks. For many, many, many councils, that's problematic. I would think that you would want the council to hit the ground running and you would want to have that short period where they could be oriented. There are issues around meetings and whether the meetings are open or not. New councils aren't open until they get sworn in under those same provisions. So I think the government needs to take a second look at the writ period and also the lame duck period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is always a pleasure to rise and share the thoughts of my constituents from Windsor West in the brief two minutes I have on Bill 181, Municipal Elections Modernization Act, and to make comments to what the minister responsible for seniors affairs has said.

I think one of the concerns that I have is that we have, I believe, a 65-page bill that was only tabled a few days ago. That hasn't really given opposition members an opportunity to comb over it, see what the bill is all about and then go back to our municipalities and speak to our city councils, our mayors, talk to our constituents and see what they think. I know the government says they've consulted. I believe a year ago, they announced they were going to go out and consult. But it could be history repeating itself.

We look at a budget that they said they consulted on. They have wasted a lot of people's time and efforts during consultations. They didn't wait for the committee to come forward and report on those consultations that they did on the budget. They tabled the budget before the committee even reported. So we have some concerns on this side. I certainly have concerns about how much con-

sultation actually took place. Were they really listening and really taking to heart what the municipalities were saying? Or did they already have this legislation drafted the way they want things to be done and just pretended they were consulting, pretended they were listening to the municipalities?

I have great concern over the legitimacy of this legislation. I look forward to having more time to read through it and to go back to my city council, my mayor and my constituents of Windsor West to ask what they think, because I just don't trust the consultations that the government side does.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to spend a couple of minutes on the comments from Minister Sergio and Minister Gravelle. They talked about a lot of specifics that are in the bill. I want to focus a little bit, really, on the consultation piece.

Speaker, this is something that happens every four years. It's not something that nobody is expecting to happen. Almost a year ago, we announced that the consultation process was going to begin. I know for a fact that there were over 3,400 submissions to the minister on what municipalities and people thought about potential revisions to the Municipal Elections Act. We talked to folks at AMO and Good Roads. I know that we met with municipal leaders, and this came up many, many times, Speaker, so it's hard to comprehend that there was no discussion.

I know in my own riding—and in many others—I meet with local councils. This is one of the things I check off on the list when I talk to those folks about the issues of the day and the issues that affect municipalities.

There will be more consultations. It will go through second reading. It will go to committee. There will be lots of input.

To talk about the ranked ballot, municipalities have an option. They have an option if they want to have a referendum. They have to do some statutory things, which will be outlined in regulation, about open houses or public meetings about their vision, if they still want to choose it, if they want to go down that—I suspect probably not a lot of them are going to go the first time around. They're going to wait and see.

Speaker, consultations have happened, and we're going to do more after second reading. So I look forward to getting this bill passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join, in a brief way, the debate this morning on the changes to the Municipal Elections Act.

I agree with my colleague from Leeds–Grenville with regard to the writ period. I was a last-minute subscriber to a municipal election when I ran in 1997. In fact, that afternoon on the deadline—the deadline was in September; September 10, I think it was—I had three people visit my office at the store—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, they didn't call me Yak there—saying “You've got to run. It's time for you to go.” I made that decision and then was subsequently elected to the municipal council in Barry's Bay.

But I really want to talk about the ranked balloting part of this piece of legislation. We've had the first-past-the-post system since Confederation. It may not be perfect, but it has worked quite adequately and quite well. But if you're going to change the way that you elect representatives at any level, whether it's federal, provincial or municipal, then I believe that in this legislation there should be the requirement for a municipal referendum so that the people have their say.

This is not something that a council should be able to adopt as the way that they're going to change how people are elected in that community. Nobody's asking for it. In fact, the city of Toronto has withdrawn their request for ranked balloting. So if there's nobody requesting it, the people within a municipality should have the final say in our democracy as to whether you're going to change how people get elected to the positions that they hold. I think that that is absolutely necessary.

In fact, I'll give the government credit here: In 2007, on the issue of preferential voting or mixed member representation, the McGuinty government held a referendum so that the people across Ontario could have their say. Don't make this change without allowing the people to have their say. We live in a democracy. The people get their say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the minister responsible for seniors for final comments.

Hon. Mario Sergio: For final comments, I definitely agree in some ways with my charming colleague the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. The reason the bill is here is to give municipalities that particular opportunity, that option. Of course, we all would like to have this wonderful thing called democracy work. If we give the direction to local municipalities and we give them the option to do it, by all means.

I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that there are many, many problems during a municipal election, during a municipal campaign. One of the major ones—you may think it's not serious—is voters lists. It's huge; it's a big issue. We are saying, “Let's clean it up.” Campaigning is an issue. I can go north of Steeles in my area and all the boulevards are full of election signs. It looks like Christmas trees all over the place. But on the south side of Steeles, you're not allowed. So I think there is a lot of cleaning up to do.

Now, I have to thank all the members who participated in the debate this morning. But let me say, Speaker, that something has to be done, and what better way to tell local municipalities to do it, if they so wish?

0930

Now, this is only second reading. I hope that, indeed, we will involve other people and stakeholders in the community to have their say as well. I totally agree with the members who have spoken, that there are issues that need to be addressed. This is one of the reasons why we

are debating the bill. We all have our own experience locally. There are a lot of areas where improvements must be made so that we can improve the accountability and transparency when a local municipal election takes place—in every election, but as I said, local elections are the closest ones. Let's pay more attention to them.

I thank you, Speaker, and I thank all the members for their contributions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand today to lend my voice to the debate on Bill 181.

Before I do so, I'd like to go back and update my record from March 24. That was during a debate that we had with regard to the private member's initiative from the member from Ottawa—Orléans. Her private member's bill received unanimous support to recognize the first two ladies who were ever elected into the Ontario Legislature, Agnes Macphail and Mrs. Luckock.

During the debate, I mentioned that I grew up with a municipal office in my home until I was a teenager. I remember everything very well, every nuance that's involved in a person being a clerk-treasurer and ultimately administrator for a local municipality. I was very proud that day to share that my mother, Winona Thompson, was either the first or second woman ever to be named clerk to a municipal township in Huron county. I was hesitant; I said "first or second." I shot mom an email very quickly, and she got back to me right after the debate. I just wanted to make sure, because this is something that we need to celebrate. The first clerk ever named in the county of Huron, specifically for the township of West Wawanosh, was a dear family friend, Joan Armstrong. Mom was the second clerk that was named in Huron county, to the township of East Wawanosh.

It's really nice to have a chance to celebrate this type of leadership and mentorship, because back home in Huron county the retired clerks have a club where they get together for lunch once a month. I'm sure they'll be talking about this. They welcome people to their club on a regular basis. But there's a lot of camaraderie and a lot of pride that goes along with working and serving the people of local municipalities. One thing, one thread that ties all of those people together, past and present, is the serving of the public and making sure democracy is upheld.

This is where I pull my link back into the debate for Bill 181, because democracy has to be upheld, and people really, truly need to have their say. In that regard, I'd like to reflect on a comment that I just heard this past Saturday night. It was a comment that came from the CAO of the township of Morris-Turnberry. She's very concerned, Speaker, and I will share that concern in a second.

But when the member from Leeds—Grenville, during his two-minute hit on the government debate, referenced the concern over the extended lameduck period, I couldn't help but transition that lame duck concept over to this government, because what I heard from the CAO

of Morris-Turnberry is that they're very concerned about this lame duck government because they're holding municipalities hostage to their lack of follow-through.

Education rates, education levies have yet to be set by this government, and it's holding up municipalities from finalizing their budgets. Honestly, if it's not one thing, like further downloading or decreased upfunding, now they're holding them hostage to their lack of performance. Speaker, this government needs to pull up its socks and do right by people who are striving and who pride themselves on working so well for their local municipal taxpayers. But again we find another example: This government has yet to set the education levy for this year, and it's holding municipalities back from setting their budgets. Time and time again, a lack of performance and lack of prioritization is causing people in Ontario to be frustrated and not able to fulfill their responsibilities.

As we go back to take a look specifically at Bill 181, there's no greater responsibility than that of our democratic right of electing people. We feel very strongly that the changes this government is suggesting to the Municipal Elections Act, the Assessment Act and the Education Act with respect to third-party advertising, campaign financing, compliance and enforcement, accessibility, the election calendar, voters list, eligibility to vote and run in municipal elections, election administration, as well as ranked ballots, is a little heavy-handed. It's taking us backward, especially when they're proposing all of these changes without an opportunity for people to have their voice, to exercise their right through a referendum, for instance.

We have to take time on our side as the loyal opposition to make sure municipal voices are heard, in order to ensure this bill accurately reflects what they need to run modern, successful, democratic and effective municipal elections.

I'd like to start by echoing what my colleague from Oxford, Ernie Hardeman, stated yesterday. There are some beneficial aspects to this bill. We, however, are concerned with key components that have the potential to ignore fundamental aspects of the democratic process.

For instance, the electoral process is an important and intrinsic part of any democratic society. As such, whenever changes are proposed to that process, our party firmly believes that serious and substantive consultation should be conducted. I have said that on numerous occasions about numerous issues that have been perpetuated by this government. Most important to consultation on this particular issue is the need to allow the public a forum in which they can voice their opinion on that matter. I'll touch a little bit more in detail later on that issue in my debate, because this Liberal government—which ran on a platform, ironically, of open and transparent governance—has been failing the people of Ontario in this respect. Bill 181 is just another long list, as I've alluded to.

There are three key issues we—and I, specifically, during my time—would like to address: the abolishment of the leave of absence exemption for volunteer fire-

fighters who choose to run for municipal office; the continued practice by this Liberal government to leave the working-out of critical details to regulation—and seriously, any time a government chooses to put the meat on the bones behind closed doors, it should cause everyone reason for concern—and thirdly, the concerning lack of public consultation that this bill allows for.

We just heard from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke that people deserve to have their say, and I totally agree with that. I'd also like to get on record, for the people watching this debate at home, what exactly this government is trying to propose with regard to a ranked ballot system. I know our esteemed colleague from Oxford highlighted how the system worked yesterday, but it's a complicated method of voting. If we're going to have any sort of informed debate, we must ensure that everyone understands how that works. So I'm just going to go over that again this morning.

In a ranked balloting system, a candidate is required to get 50% of the vote plus one. When you receive your ballot on election day, the candidates will be listed on it in no particular order. As the voter, you then number them as 1 for your most preferred candidate, 2 for your second preferred candidate, 3 for your third and so on, down to your least preferred candidate.

After the polls close, the number of times each candidate was selected as first choice is tallied up. The candidate with the least number of first-place votes is eliminated. The eliminated candidate's votes are then redistributed to the second-place choices on all of the ballots where the eliminated candidate was ranked first. This means that on a ballot where the first-choice candidate was eliminated, the second-choice candidate becomes the preferred candidate. The ballots are recounted and the process continues until a candidate receives the required number of votes to win.

Again, as a kid, I remember the great effort and pride that went into pulling together the voters list and making sure they were distributed throughout the community and throughout the township at the community hub, so to speak, so that everyone could ensure their name was indeed on the voters list. Because back in that day, people knew it was a privilege and an honour to vote, to cast their opinion as to who they wanted to see in their municipal leadership, their municipal council. I hope with all my heart that that privilege and that honour is sustained as we look to a voter turnout—be it municipally, provincially or federally—that seems to be dwindling throughout the years.

0940

Looking at my riding of Huron–Bruce, I'm very proud that, in 2011, Huron–Bruce had the greatest voter turnout in the provincial election and, in 2014, it had the second-highest voter turnout in that particular provincial election. I just want to applaud the good folks from Huron–Bruce at this time for their efforts to get out and exercise their voice and vote, and I want to encourage them to continue to do so.

It gets a little grey when this government starts introducing the concept of a ranked ballot system. It very well

could be confusing to some and turn them off, and we don't want to do that. As was pointed out yesterday, we want to ensure that people embrace this new approach to electing a municipal council. While it appears that this government may have conducted some consultation to implement a ranked ballot system, it appears that there has been a lack of consultation on what system, specifically, would be preferred.

I'm not sure about the rest of the MPPs in the House today, but I know the realities, in my home municipality of South Bruce and across the riding—and, I would dare say, there's probably a theme throughout Ontario—are that we can't make it more difficult for individuals to throw their hat in the ring to run for municipal council. We can't make it more difficult to encourage people to come out and vote. In many instances in our wards, people are being acclaimed and, to me, that's a little bit of a worry, because, given the direction this province is currently heading under this government, I would hope more and more people would want to be engaged, would want to embrace the opportunity to try and make a difference and to correct the path that we're on. Again, we're finding there's a trend where acclamations are probably more the norm than not. We don't want to confuse and make things more difficult.

We'll talk about that, that the example—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: You need to get out more, Lou.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: —yes, exactly—of how this particular bill addresses the interests of a volunteer firefighter to throw their hat into the ring is a perfect example of how they're making it more difficult.

The Toronto Star had an article written by David Rider back in May 2015. It's interesting: The conclusion to all of that, after I read that article, is that there's nothing impartial about dictating which electoral system is best for the people without consulting them.

I mentioned volunteer firefighters and I want to jump into that in a little bit more detail. A few months ago, one concern we had in the PC Party was the impact on first responders. Under this bill, the leave-of-absence exemption for volunteer firefighters will be removed. This means that if someone in this capacity wants to run for office, they would be unable to serve in their community for a minimum of 13 weeks.

Again, this just shows the absolute disconnect this government has with the realities of rural Ontario. Our fire departments, thankfully, in all the communities in my riding, are supported by a wonderful team of volunteer firefighters. They have their families to care for, they have their daily jobs that they go to, but, honestly, that team of volunteer firefighters is finite. If somebody would like to throw their hat in the ring for consideration for municipal council, to have them leave that volunteer fire department for 13 weeks will leave a hole in our volunteer teams. That's a concern. It's something that was probably completely overlooked by this government when they rushed the legislation and their consultations in that regard.

I know that in the riding of Huron–Bruce, many of our fire stations, as I mentioned, are comprised of volunteers: The Central Huron Fire Department relies on 20 volunteer firefighters; the Blyth and District Fire Department consists of 22 volunteer firefighters; the Ripley–Huron Fire Department is staffed by 10 volunteers; the Lucknow and District Fire Department is served by 24 volunteers; the Walkerton Fire Department relies on 29 volunteer firefighters; and the Teeswater fire department is comprised of a great team of 22 individuals who are proud to call Teeswater home. But again, they're on rotating teams. Thinking that they might like to make a difference at a municipal level would remove them from that team and remove them from their camaraderie and their commitment to keeping our community safe.

I'm concerned. What are they going to do? They're going to either keep people away from pursuing an interest in serving their communities at the municipal level as a potential councillor, or our volunteer firefighters and our fire departments will suffer and not have as many volunteers to call upon. It's not right. This government, as I said, has proven themselves to be yet again disconnected from the realities of rural Ontario.

Now, let's talk a little bit about regulation. In the PC Party, we also have concerns that many of the important details of this bill are left to regulation and not subject to parliamentary process and public scrutiny. It makes me think of Bill 172. A lot of the cap-and-trade scheme, if you will, that this government is introducing will be achieved through regulation. I can't stress how many businesses, how many organizations, are very anxious and worried about what regulations will do to them and their businesses and their future, for that matter, as they define this scheme behind closed doors via regulation.

In fact, going back to Bill 181, whole sections of this proposed legislation could be overruled by regulation, despite having gone through the legislative process. Again, how democratic is that? Regulations defined behind closed doors, behind these closed government doors, will not be open to debate in the public forum of this wonderful chamber in the legislative House of Ontario. Instead, it will be decided upon behind closed doors, by bureaucrats who have been given their lead by the minister or cabinet.

One example that I specifically want to outline today is section 41.1, subsection 6. It states, "If, in the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, it is necessary or desirable in order to further the purposes of this section and this act, the regulation may vary the operation of any of the following provisions of this act or may provide that any of the following provisions do not apply with respect to a ranked ballot election...."

Following that, there are no less than 10 sections, subsections and clauses that could be changed or entirely struck out at the whim of a regulation. This should give everyone cause for worry. The legislative process, as you know, Speaker, is in place to ensure that there is accountable, transparent government. That's what this government across the floor stood on. That's what we heard about in the throne speech after we came back.

Sadly, there is absolutely no proof through the years and the last few months that this government is adhering to its own path of transparency and accountability. They have totally thrown that to the wind. Instead, they're covering their backs, they're circling their wagons and they're closing their doors because they know they've failed Ontarians and the only way forward is to continue to do things behind closed doors.

The people of this province have a right to know the details of how they select their representatives municipally. That should not change, election year to election year, simply because three ministers are able to sit in a room together and contrive a new approach. Speaker, we've heard that people across Ontario and Canada are struggling to feel like their voice counts. If that process is allowed to continuously change at the leisure of those who control the system, the good intentions to increase voter turnout will ultimately fail. That was one of the worries that I shared at the onset of jumping into this debate today.

Public consultation is absolutely void in this government. It doesn't matter whether it's the Green Energy Act—we just met with the Environmental Commissioner last week. The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock had a representative of a local municipality in her riding come forward and say that they're actually redacting and disallowing the realities around noise with regard to the industrial wind turbines. They're absolutely not allowing it. Then they have the nerve, in an ERT, to come forward with a position saying, "Well, there were no complaints."

Interjection.

0950

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes. After they redacted and did not allow any discussion further on noise complaints with regard to industrial wind turbines, they said there were no complaints. It's shameful how this government is acting.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to stand in this fine Legislature this morning and add my two cents and my two minutes to the thoughtful comments from my colleague from Huron–Bruce on Bill 181, focusing on municipal elections and proposed changes.

I would like to say to the member from Huron–Bruce that I appreciated her starting us off with reminding us to celebrate leadership and mentorship within our own ridings, as she had told us the story of the first and second clerks in her area and how they served the public and upheld democracy. I think that's where we should be starting our conversation from, a spirit of engagement, because if we're going to talk about democracy, we do need to focus on engaging people and bringing them into the process and making sure that any barriers to engagement don't exist, whether that's for those who are seeking to run as candidates or for those who are wanting to vote. Anywhere that we can reduce those barriers, we need to.

To her point that people must have their say and acknowledging people's feelings of frustration with the process, we do need a process that reflects the voices, the wants and needs of our municipalities, of the engaged public. We do need, and I forget how she worded it, a modern, effective, democratic—and there was a fourth point, maybe open or transparent, perhaps—process. That is what we want to have. That is the direction that we need to go.

Also, I think it's important to keep having the conversation, that any time this government is making decisions behind closed doors without the consultations that are necessary, we have concerns. So we continue to debate this and hold them to account.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciate the interesting comments by the member from Huron–Bruce. I remember here in Toronto we had a referendum where 76% of the people of Toronto said they didn't want the megacity and they didn't want their municipalities amalgamated, yet the government of the time still forced the amalgamation. Talk about local democracy.

The other point here is that municipalities have the option of whether to have the ranked ballot system or not. That choice is given to every local municipality.

The other changes proposed in the act, a lot of them, are quite complex, and to try to get agreement on all of these is going to be quite interesting, because I'm sure if you talked to the over 400 mayors and reeves across Ontario, you're going to get so many different opinions and so many different variations. But I think the main thing about this act is that it's at least starting—over the last year, there has been a good discussion and debate about municipal elections.

I know that when we talk about voter turnout, the voter turnout in Toronto has been going up every year. I know people think there is a magical way of increasing voter turnout. The best way I see of increasing voter turnout is by interesting the electorate. If you've got boring campaigns, boring candidates, the electorate doesn't come out to vote. Luckily, in Toronto over the last decade, we've had a lot of interesting engagement, and it's very healthy in terms of seeing the turnout go up. I don't think you're going to find a quick fix.

I hope to talk about my pet peeve on this in the future, but I'll let you know about that later.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm going to talk about my pet peeve in this bill. I've talked to four ministers about this, and numerous ministry staff. It's about the new section that's in the act, section 88.24.

Presently, what happened in the system is that if you didn't file with the clerk, you would be basically disbarred out of office. Many, many councillors in my riding and across the province ended up paying thousands of dollars—some in excess of \$10,000—to go to the judge and basically say, "I didn't know the provisions," or

"They weren't explained to me." And every time, the judge gave them their seat back.

I went to ministers over and over and over again and said, "Why are the penalties so excessive for municipalities as opposed to, for example, provincial politicians?" I think it was my NDP candidate in the last two elections who didn't file on the deadline, applied to the Chief Electoral Officer and was given an extension. Pretty easy, right? But in this case, previous to this section of the bill, that wasn't possible. In fact, in my riding, one of the clerks had a death in the family, and in fact, every member of council and every candidate was disbarred from office. They all collectively had to go to the judge and make an application to get put back. Not at any time did anybody from the ministry or any minister make any opportunity to make those changes. I had meetings with each and every one of them and asked them specifically to fix that.

Finally this section is fixed. I'm not particularly happy about the late filing fee of \$500, even regardless of whether they can get it back. I think their rules for filing an extension for their expenses for the campaign should be exactly the same as our rules.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always an honour to stand on behalf of the good people of Algoma–Manitoulin.

I want to give a shout-out to the member from Huron–Bruce, who started out her comments this morning making points in regard to remarkable women who have come through this Legislature. I wanted to thank her, because I always like starting my day on a good note. It made me think of someone remarkable, a remarkable woman who actually gave me the opportunity of being here. For whatever reason—I don't know why—out of the five boys at home, she picked on me and punished me, because she carried me along to every one of the campaigns. I was along with her, and I quite hated it. But here I am today thanks to her. I miss her every day. My mom was definitely a woman who deserves to have her own statue.

She did highlight two big points that have stood out to me in her comments this morning, with the engagement process. Across Algoma–Manitoulin, I have 37 municipalities. This is going to be a huge task as far as engaging with each and every one's leadership, which we already started.

The bill is entitled An Act to amend Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make—key word—complementary amendments. Those complementary amendments should come without any concerns, without any discouragement of individuals participating at the municipal level. But this is what is actually happening. What raises alarms with me is that in many of my municipalities, many individuals wear different hats. People are on recreation committees. People are volunteer firefighters. People are on the council. People are on a variety of committees. This might hinder their opportunity to serve their communities.

So these are some of the things that I'm going to be going out and actually having that discussion about with a lot of my municipal leaders and fire departments, because as I said, we wear many hats in small communities in northern Ontario. This restricts us from being a participant in the future of our communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Huron–Bruce for final comment.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I certainly appreciate the comments from the members from Oshawa, Eglinton–Lawrence, Leeds–Grenville and Algoma–Manitoulin.

It is all about engagement. I just want to reflect on a few comments and quotes that I have, reflecting on the fact that this government is all over the map. In February of this past year, an Insights West poll found that 65% of Canadians say a referendum should definitely or probably be held on any changes to an electoral system. What is concerning is the seemingly laissez-faire attitude that the Minister for Municipal Affairs and Housing has taken on the matter.

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When the lack of a referendum was criticized on social media, this minister took to Twitter with a response, saying, “Under Municipal Act any municipality can hold a referendum on any issue. Some may choose this route. So be it.” But then—it’s interesting—just this past week, there was an article from the Kingston Whig Standard quoting the Deputy Premier. She said, “The local voice does matter, but we are not prepared to give people a veto.” This government is all over the map. I would suggest that the ministers get together with the Premier and their deputy to get their act together.

Mr. John Yakubuski: At the kitchen table.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes. Absolutely. You raise a good point. In no way should policy be devised around a private kitchen table. We’re having too much of that.

I just want to close by sharing the position that the PC Party has. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition, my leader, Patrick Brown, said just this past weekend, “No government should rush through electoral reform without first putting it to the citizens to decide. The government of the day doesn’t get to change the electoral system, given that they, themselves, are an interested party. I believe if you’re going to change how we have elections ... a referendum is necessary.” I couldn’t agree more.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It’s my pleasure to join in the debate. First off, I think it’s important that we address some of the concerns that have been raised in the previous municipal election, and this review resulted in some issues that were raised. Some of the key areas that people were concerned with were the way people were selecting their municipal leaders and the idea of a ranked ballot. There were some issues around the election calendar, and other key areas were some of the enforcement, which previous members have talked about; some of the imbalances with respect to the way the enforcement would apply to municipalities—they’re much more strict;

and how provincially, the enforcement rules are far different.

Some of the key areas that I want to touch on, and some of the key areas that I think are important to address—first and foremost, a ranked ballot option. I understand that this provides that option to municipalities. Now, we see all too often in elections, generally speaking, that the turnout is abysmally low. It’s a serious problem. We look at the Canadian system, and the highest turnouts are in our federal, and then with every other level of government it becomes lower and lower. When it comes to provincial, it’s lower than federal, and municipal elections are some of the lowest turnouts.

The funny thing is, and I’m sure you hear this all the time, Mr. Speaker, is that it’s the municipal levels of government that probably have the most impact on our day-to-day lives, but that’s where we have the lowest turnout. Some of the concern is that perhaps the system, or the way that the election process goes about it, is disenfranchising or discouraging people from being involved.

One of the solutions may be this ranked ballot system. It allows for a more interesting manner in which we select our leaders. But more important than allowing it in a more interesting manner, one of the things we see that we lack here in Ontario, specifically in Toronto, is that Toronto is probably one of the most diverse cities not only in Canada, but probably in the world, and despite that diversity, we don’t see that diversity reflected in the municipal leadership.

What can we do to encourage the representation of more women, more racialized community members and people from different backgrounds? What can we do to make it more accessible? There is significant research and arguments are made that a ranked ballot system would make it easier to allow other individuals who are historically marginalized to be elected. Wherever there have been ranked ballot systems, more women have been elected and younger people are often elected, as well as more racialized members of the community are elected. That’s a positive thing. If we can encourage that, I think that’s something that should be supported. Allowing that opportunity or that option to municipalities is something that we should certainly look at, and I think that’s a positive step in the right direction.

Generally speaking, though, we need to do more to make it easier to vote. I think that’s something that’s not really addressed in this bill that could have been addressed. I think, looking at this modern age—the 21st century, the digital age—we really need to look at how we can make it easier so that people can participate in the democratic system. It needs to be something that everyone is involved in. It needs to be something that is easy. We find that, whether it’s in health promotion, people will do what’s healthy if it’s the easier option. People will choose the easier option. If you make the healthy option the easier option—which is a strong campaign in the health promotion field—people will choose that healthier option. So in the democratic realm, if we make it easier to be involved in your civic responsibility of

voting, if we make it more accessible, the idea would be that more people would be involved and more people would participate.

That's an area that this bill doesn't address, and I think it's something we should discuss here. Perhaps we can find ways to make some amendments in committee to ensure that—we can look at extending the hours. Many people work in the evening, and the cut-off being a strict 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. sometimes doesn't allow for people to get home from work, to refresh and then get back out into the lineups and vote.

We need to look at something that has been considered a number of times: Are there ways that we can find an online process, a digital process, where we can vote? I know the first response to that is always, "How do you prevent fraud? How do you prevent people from voting in an inappropriate manner?" I'm sure we can come up with some creative solutions, but to me, it just doesn't make sense that we're not making full use of the available technology to ensure that people vote; particularly, the accessibility issue for people who have different abilities, who aren't able to get out there physically and go vote, for whatever physical limitations in terms of their mobility. We need to have a strong and easy system for people to make sure that they can get out and vote.

Another area this bill talks about is third-party advertising. That's something that has been addressed and raised in all levels of government, whether it's federal or whether it's provincial and, again, obviously, at the municipal level as well. As a broad principle, the way our current system is laid out, it should be the case that the everyday person—that their voice is not eclipsed by individuals or corporations who have more power or more access to resources, and that shouldn't be a way of defining or a way of determining their ability to impact an election.

In the current system, with the third-party advertising rules as they are, there is the potential for people, organizations, corporations or entities with deep pockets to be able to influence elections in perhaps a way that discourages the true principles of democracy. That's something that people have raised as a concern. However, we also need to be very aware that, in addressing third-party advertising, we don't unfairly impact community organizations, which are actually the voice of the community. They're not an unfair representation of the voice of one small group, but in fact a representation of the entire community.

There are groups like ACORN, which speaks on behalf of tenants. They have a campaign called Toronto Tenants Vote, which encourages tenants to vote. We often find in voting turnout that those who own their own property are more likely to vote, but people who are renting—those who are tenants in an apartment building—are less likely to. So ACORN mounted a campaign to encourage more people to actually get out and vote. The concern is that, with very strict third-party advertising limitations, perhaps a campaign which is to encourage people to vote might be limited by these types of

rules. So we need to be sure that we're addressing the actual concern, which is the disproportionate impact of an entity being able to have too much of a say or too much of a voice versus allowing community voices to be heard. In fact, a community organization which is actually trying to encourage more people to vote—that shouldn't be stopped.

There are other groups that do great work in our community that are by no means trying to usurp democracy or trying to overshadow the voice of the everyday person. Campaigns like the cancer society's Fighting for Life campaign was something that was a demand that this organization had to encourage municipalities to disclose the use and location of carcinogens. Now, that's a very fair demand and they're trying to speak for the concerns of everyday folks and people about where carcinogens are located, where they're being used and if municipalities are using them.

That type of campaign or that type of organization might be limited by the proposed laws. I guess that's something that we really need to focus in on. Are those the types of campaigns that we want to discourage? Is there a distinction between what we really want to limit when it comes to third-party advertising?

Another example: There's TTCriders. They do phenomenal work in our community with respect to promoting public transit. If during a campaign period they were to advertise the importance of public transit, that the community needs more public transit—as New Democrats, we fully support the idea that we need to aggressively invest in improving our public transit and infrastructure. If they were to mount a campaign to promote these issues during a political campaign, they might be precluded from doing so, though their whole organization is built up on membership of local community members. They are the voice of people in the public, in the community, and they're simply voicing the concerns of their members. Now, if they're precluded from being involved in voicing their concerns and the concerns of their members, again, are we really addressing the real concerns when it comes to third-party advertising? That's another concern.

To bring it closer to home on a specific issue, the sell-off of our Hydro One is an issue that impacts various community members. It's something that's going to impact our province, broadly speaking. Community organizations that come together to say, "This is something we need to oppose," and perhaps there's a campaign during an election period where they want to talk municipally about this issue and say, "Listen, this is something that should be brought up by our municipal leaders"—if various groups come together and band together on this issue, the concern is that they might be precluded from using a united platform to raise this issue and perhaps engage in town halls or engage in some form of organizing to get people together to say, "Listen, this public asset is being sold off. Let's organize so that, at least on the municipal level, we can have a voice in our municipal level of government that opposes this." Perhaps that

organizing itself might be limited due to this proposed amendment of third-party advertising.

That's, again, why it's so important for us to really home in on what it is that we really want to limit. We want to limit the unfair advantage that deep pockets or greater resources might have on your ability to have a louder voice in a democratic system than one individual or groups of individuals. That's something that we really need to focus in on: Do we cast the net too broadly and cover organizations or community groups that are actually doing important work in expressing the concerns of the community, providing a platform for that? Are they going to be precluded because of these rules? That's something we certainly need to take a look at.

Mr. Speaker, I'm mindful of the time. I don't want to go over and leave you in a position where you have to quickly stop me. I've noticed your indication; thank you very much for that.

In wrapping up—I will have more time to address these issues in more detail later on—there are a number of very good changes that are proposed by this bill. There are more areas that need more clarity. I look forward, later on, to providing more details and perhaps some suggestions on how we can improve. Thank you.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank all members for their debate this morning. Since it is close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before we move on to introduction of guests, I want you to know that I will be introducing the Speaker's guests in the gallery and that we will be as brief as possible, as there seems to be a very large number of visitors today. So let's move that along.

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm pleased to introduce today students from the Robert Land Academy in my riding—I'm proud to say I'm a board member; I'm honoured to be on the board at Robert Land—and their leadership Major Kevin Wendling, Lieutenant Rick Infantino, Lieutenant Stewart Jones, and Captain Geoff Bowman. Again, welcome to the cadets from the Robert Land Academy.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's Girls' Government day here, and I just want to introduce, from Humbercrest Public School, teacher Kathleen Scott-Houchen and students Emma Stuart Kiss, Ryley Nathaniel, Ameera Bogle, Lucy Hanna, Armita Ebrahimnejad and Sumaya Goulet; and from St. James Catholic School, teacher Cecilia DeMonte Bahr, Jasmine Dos Santos, Sophia Laspinas, Milda Gutasikaite, Jeniffer Aguilar, Kyara Charles, Sydney Turnbull and Breanna Lewis-Patterson. And Equal Voice is in the House as well.

Hon. Charles Sousa: It's my pleasure to welcome representatives of the National Airlines Council of Canada and their partners to the Legislature today. I under-

stand they have a full day of meetings with members and staff from all parties and are looking forward to discussing the aviation and tourism sectors with all of us today. Welcome to the gallery.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome, in the west members' gallery, Ms. Susan Pearce, with the Ontario Autism Coalition, formerly of Sarnia-Lambton and now of Toronto.

Miss Monique Taylor: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, the House is full today with families of autism, and they're joining us here today. I'm going to start the list by welcoming Erin Syer, Lelia Greenfield, Kirk Greenfield, Tetyana Kofanova, Erin Rogerson, Terry Wright, Jill Breugem, Jennifer Majer, Sarah Haight, Charan Machado, Glen Machado, Irine Ogrodnik, David Galvao, Linda Galvao, Nancy Silva Khan, Dylan Dias, Anita Marques, Josie Spatafora, Anne Mason, Sarah Jones, Niveen Shrem, Lisa Kota, Robin Konstantopoulos, David Lehtinen, Jennifer Chu, Nicole Taylor, Paul Taylor and Gary Burbridge.

Many more will be introduced by my other caucus members. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to congratulate Cooper Stone from Durham, who is page captain here today, and to welcome his family in the east members' gallery to Queen's Park: his mom and dad, Jen and Gareth; sister Sophia; and grandparents Michael, Nancy, Michael and Susan. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I would like to echo my NDP colleagues' welcome to families with children who have autism, but most particularly, I want to welcome Nathan, who made my day this morning by giving me a great big Queen's Park hug. Welcome.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I too wish to introduce parents who are here on the autism issue: Alexandra Dezenhouse, Kelly Dunklee, Adelia Novielli, Fatima Tavaniello, Natalie Proia, Sonia Carnovale, Nick Carnovale, Jennifer Taylor, Melanie Cooper, Jeanne-Marie Brennan, Amanda Martin, Gasparino Strazzeri, Cheyenne Procenko and David Procenko.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome three groups of students from my riding of Scarborough-Agincourt: from the Jean Augustine Girls' Leadership Academy, teacher Jacqueline Smith and students Reem Wahab, Hanifa Beni-Asaf, Mariam Saleem and Aravi Shanmugalingam; from Kennedy Public School, the principal, Rhonda Cohen-Pierobon, teacher Camille Khan and students Joey Zhuo, Lily Cao, Jessica Zhang and Anson Wu; and from St. Sylvester Catholic School, the principal, Roy Fernandes, will be joining us shortly, with teacher Oycie Povo and students Madonna Estefanos, Briana Pereira, Katrina Villarino and Juno Lins. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to welcome to question period Ms. Nancy Laver, who is here to discuss autism with us today.

Mr. Paul Miller: Further to the list that the honourable member from Hamilton Mountain added: Angela Mok, Evelyn Wong, Hubert Wong, Anthony Konstantopoulos, Jeff Lipinski and Monique Saunders. Welcome.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park the Rolling Meadows elementary school grade 8 girls leadership group and their teachers, Tanya Ferro and Sandra Lumsden, from my riding in Burlington. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome the parents who drove in from Kitchener to also attend the autism press conference this morning. Welcome, parents from Kitchener.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd also like to welcome some families dealing with autism. They are Kimberly Murray, Tammy Frazer, Rebecca Haight, Jenna Lech, Raquel Turner, Ingrid Rijo, Marie Fatima Soares Goncalves, Elisha Chesler, Stephanie Giguere, Nisha Kapadia, Daniela Tripolino, Giuseppina Chaves, Eleonora Morgillo and Andrea Rios.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to welcome 14 students from my riding of Davenport participating in Girls' Government day at the Legislature today. I want to welcome the girls from St. Clare, accompanied by principal Manuela Sequeira; St. Nicholas of Bari with their vice-principal, Ms. Ruscitto-D'Addario; and from my very own elementary school, St. Rita, the girls who are here today with their teacher, Mr. Contiga. Welcome, girls, and have a great day here at Queen's Park.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to welcome Susan Pearce and the many people from York region who have come here to emphasize the importance of autism.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to welcome a number of other families who have joined us today for the autism news conference: Stan Byma, Ilinaz Naeli, Tania Ratnam, Sherie and Mark Hatfield, Rachel Nicole Williams, Samantha Lynn Bliss, Nancy Marchese, Kristen Ellison, Heather Bourdon, and Linda, Anthony and Tony DiMambro.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I, too, would like to welcome Kristen Ellison from the riding of Northumberland—Quinte West. I had the pleasure of meeting her last Friday.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to introduce Diana Santucci, Sabrina Puopolo, Nicole DeVries, Michael DeVries, Emanuele Caruso, Venette Gerden, Jing Ding, Michelle Makris, Malgorzata Szygula, Gurjeet Gakhal, Aiden Gakhal, Tobi Riley, Dayna Janicki, Louella Mendonsa, Tracey-Anne White, Marimuthu Ramakrishnan, Vidhya Thangam and Shrinithin Marimuthu, who are here to fight for their children and all children in the province of Ontario with autism.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to welcome all the families here today who are here to speak out about autism and the challenges that they face.

I'd like to welcome Jowita Filipowicz, Mieszko Filipowicz, Edgar Filipowicz, Victoria Filipowicz, Dr. Janet McLaughlin, Carmen Genuardi-Binns, Eva Bissell, Stephanie Gallant, Isabella Bissell, Francesca Bissell, Jeremy Pottle, Debbie Samuels, Laura Martin and Sampaguita Tan.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's a pleasure to welcome my constituent Chrissy Orr, who's a civics teacher with Neil

McNeil High School and here with her class of civic students, our young leaders of tomorrow. Welcome.

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M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue à Queen's Park aux gens qui sont ici pour appuyer les enfants avec l'autisme. Je commence avec Carmel Bourdon, Bren et Christina Vieira, Tanya Corey, Melissa Bottoni, Samantha Billings, Julian McDowell, Ivy La Rue, Stephanie Kerschbaumer, Mason Riley, Natalie Janicki, Anna Kim, Nancy Marchese and Yanina Kanevsky. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome Dave Camilleri, Hadil Lewis, Sabrina Tavares, Fatima Costa, Diana Rojas, George Kourtis, Nina Pereira, Christina Charalambous, Stephanie MacLellan, Catherine Brunner, Cassandra Burton, Dora Ferreira, Georgea Sarantopoulos, Abbey McCann and, from Waterloo, Laura Martin, Niveen Shrem and Sarah Jones. Thank you for coming today.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to introduce Kevin Wendling, who is the father to page Ariel Wendling and who is here with us in this session. He's in the members' gallery.

I'd also like to introduce some families dealing with autism who are here for the media event today: Daniela Dattomo, Jennifer David-Ortuoste, Joshua Wong, Georgette Spence-Morris, Peter Leung, Yuet Hei Lam, Catharine Grossi, Jessica Cabral, Jennifer Heath, Venette Gerden, Janet Bojti, Cynthia Capa, Joslin Lopez and Flora Ho. Welcome.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Further names I'd like to introduce in regard to the fight against autism: Melissa Mark, Tina Pinto, Pedro Pinto, Nathan Pinto, Michael Luchka, Alice Billones, Shannon Beauregard, Matthew Kuzmic, Steve Kuzmic, Chelsey Rupnow, Scott Parker, Marlene Pereira, Meghan Stevens and Rachel Lam.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: We have more members here visiting today from the autism coalition: Tia-Paz Riopel, Tajtan Kuzmic, Karel Kuzmic, Sheng-Xiang Ding, Zhiyun Duan, Matthew Joseph Perusco, Ryan Fentie, Susan Fentie-Pearce, Melissa Page, James D'Aprile, Rosaria Micks, Kayla Medeiros, Nakita Medeiros and LeeAnn Gallo.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I would also like to welcome members of the autism coalition, and I apologize to anyone whose name I do not pronounce correctly: Stephanie Galluzzo, Nellie and Pavlos Simtikidis, Ross Maclean, Korine Goodman-Maclean, Brenna Bloodworth, Amy Hackett, Itai Sever, Sophia Sairoglou, Heather Bourdon, Dominique Bourdon, Jacob Bourdon and Gianna Bourdon. Welcome.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes. I'm pleased to rise to welcome the parents who are here fighting for their children: Adrian Lee, George Kurtis, Carolyn Martin, Bruce McIntosh and Karen Palmer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm also pleased to welcome those who are here fighting against the government's autism cuts—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Welcome to Laura Levesque, Sheri Robinson, Kent Robinson, Keegan Robinson, Ruby Robinson, Dr. James Porter, Kurt Lingenfelter, Stephanie Ridley, Nancy Laver, Ashley Tyler, Amy McIntosh, Cory Farrell, Sharon Gabison and Jaclyn Atkins. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: I just want to do a special thank you to the members who joined us on the panel this morning: Dr. James Porter, Kristen Ellison and Heather Bourdon. Welcome, everybody, to Queen's Park today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It wasn't lost on me that I do have rules to follow, and I know the members have rules to follow. My lenience was tested a couple of times. I would appreciate all members to abide by those offers. The five-minute limitation is actually when it should have stopped, but because I understand that we have visitors and we want them introduced, I allowed that to happen. But I would say that taking liberty would not be, in my book, getting along with the Speaker.

Would members please join me in welcoming the family of the late Mr. Frank Sheehan, MPP for Lincoln during the 36th Parliament, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: his wife, Diane; daughters Marguerite, Rebecca and Trish; sons Gordon and Vincent, with his wife, Tricia Fang; his siblings, Sister Agnes Toni Sheehan and Joe, with his wife, Mary Frances; and his grandchildren, Jacob, Molly, Ben, Will and Elizabeth Sheehan, Erin Sukkau, Sam and Nicholas Nolan, Catherine Schmidt and her husband, Jordan.

Also in the Speaker's gallery is Mr. Steve Gilchrist, former MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments; and Mr. Michael Harris, MPP for Nipissing during the 32nd, 33rd, 34th and 35th Parliaments, and Premier during the 36th and 37th Parliaments.

Welcome to Queen's Park.

FRANK SHEEHAN

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Good morning, Speaker. I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to Frank Sheehan, former member for Lincoln, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute. Do we agree? Agreed.

The member from Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to first take the opportunity to welcome the family and guests of Frank Sheehan, who are here at Queen's Park today to pay tribute to a man who was an MPP for the PC Party and who passed away on December 17, 2013.

Frank took his first step into politics as a school board trustee for the Lincoln county separate school board and then, later, as a PC MPP for the former riding of Lincoln. Frank held that seat for four years, until 1999, when the

riding boundaries changed to include a very different political climate in that riding.

Frank had a reputation for being a community heavyweight. He's remembered for his tireless work and how he championed his community and his constituents. His reputation for never being able to sit down, keep still or slow down is reflected in the countless number of causes he led and championed and many that he founded. Whether he was busy with chairing the Red Tape Commission in those days or co-founding the local Wayside House in his community, which was a transitional housing program for recovering drug addicts—just a couple of many initiatives that Frank undertook and helped lead for more than 40 years in the Niagara area. These are just a few of the testaments to his willingness to work hard and want to leave his community in better shape.

In the lead-up to his political life, he was hoping to follow in his father's footsteps to become a plumber and get involved in the plumbing business. That proved to be not in his cards, so he went on to the insurance business instead, founding a well-known insurance company, Sheehan and Rosie, which he ran successfully for more than 50 years.

His motivations to enter politics really speak to the person. He said that he didn't like the way things were and so he wanted to make a difference. His principles and his fearlessness on issues that were not always popular here and otherwise were nonetheless respected, if not always supported, even within his own caucus. It is often said that you knew exactly where he stood on any issue. He was blunt, frank—no pun intended—and honest, traits appreciated by many. It was never personal. He fundamentally believed in tackling issues and not people.

The footprint Frank left behind in Niagara alone is a testament to that. When he wasn't busy championing issues here at Queen's Park for his constituents, he was busy helping at-risk youth and community members as the former president of the John Howard Society in Niagara. He left an invaluable mark on many programs and initiatives and, of course, the people who served in those programs. He dedicated much of his time to a program that's still running in the Niagara region, the Out of the Cold program, an emergency program that provides warmth, a meal and fellowship in participating churches and public buildings.

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The Ozanam Centre of St. Catharines wouldn't be the same without Frank's leadership and time. The centre in St. Catharines opens its doors and serves more than 100 people a day with lunch and friendship. He also was very active in driving cancer patients to and from their treatments, from Niagara—just a few of the organizations that Frank was involved in that spoke to his nature, his community spirit and his caring values.

In closing, I know that many of us, politicians included, often cringe at the thought of reading about ourselves in letters to the editor, or comments about us in local newspapers. But in reading some of the comments after

Frank passed away, I thought they were important to share.

One person commented after his passing that he was a “man whose word you could take to the bank! A missing feature in most other politicians today!” Another person’s comment: “My father passed away in June of 1995; his visitation was on June 8, the day of the election” that year. “During the evening visitation, when the elections results were starting to come in, Frank Sheehan quietly arrived at the funeral home to” pay respect and to “extend his sympathies to my mother.... I have never forgotten that moment.”

In closing, although I only met Frank once or twice while he was in politics, it was a pleasure to do a little research, to discover his many qualities that I was not aware of and to have the honour of paying tribute to Frank Sheehan.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I had the opportunity and privilege of serving in the Legislative Assembly with Frank Sheehan. There are some people who will be forgettable, perhaps because they did not have huge impacts, one place or another. Frank was unforgettable; I can assure you of that.

The very fact that Mike Harris, the former Premier of the province of Ontario, is here today is evidence of the very significant role that Frank played within the Common Sense Revolution that was part of the regime of Mike Harris when he governed the province from 1995 to 2003, with Ernie Eves as the Premier at that time.

Frank was a guy who—even those people who disagreed with him really grew to like him very much. We used to sit at night from time to time, and I’d get an opportunity to go across the floor and chat with him about a number of things that related to St. Catharines, some of which didn’t relate to politics at all. You could see his deep love for and involvement in the community.

Many people said he was a penny-pincher, and he was a penny-pincher, but a penny-pincher with taxpayers’ dollars. With his own dollars, he was extremely generous to the people of our community and well beyond our borders—generous not only with money but generous with his time and with his involvement in the community.

You would expect that when the regime was in power at that time—they were a law-and-order group of people—Frank would be totally law and order, and those who had been convicted at some time or other would have been persona non grata. Frank actually took people like that under his wing. With youth, he tried to ensure that they would not become involved on the wrong side of the law. When he ran Wayside House, people would say, “Here’s a right-wing Conservative. What is he doing running Wayside House?” That was the feeling he had for people in the community who had gone astray in one way or another.

At the John Howard Society, again an organization that dealt with people who were on the wrong side of the law from time to time, Frank wasn’t afraid to take that on as a personal cause. I remember that there were cuts made, so that Wayside House had to essentially close. To

show his consistency—Frank was always consistent. He could have said, “Everything else should be cut, but not Wayside House.” He didn’t say that. His reaction at the time was to say, “If we are going in this direction, if we have to make cuts, then I can’t be exempted and my organization can’t be exempted from those cuts.” So he was very, very consistent in that regard.

I think there were three nuns and two priests in the family. Frank would not fit into that category, I can assure you—either one. He was once asked why he got into politics. He said he was tired of the frigging NDP and the frigging Liberals. Somebody asked him about that later; he said, “I didn’t say ‘frigging.’”

Laughter.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I won’t say what he said, but anyway.

Another way you judge a person, I suppose—and it may be superficial, but I think it’s meaningful—is who shows up at the funeral home and who shows up at the funeral itself. There was a long line of people. If you wanted to greet the family on the occasion to express your sympathy, you were in a long line at the funeral home, because that’s the impact he had across the community.

I mentioned him being rough and tough. He was also head of the Niagara Symphony Association at one time. He helped out with Women’s Place, which is a shelter for abused women and members of their family. He had touched a lot of people in the community.

It was a full house for the funeral and there were people from all kinds of backgrounds, some who no doubt had cursed Frank at one time or other, who were there to pay tribute to him because they knew he was consistent and that he was a man of immense principle, as far as I could see.

By the way, you know how sometimes people try to develop a consensus on an issue? Consensus was not in the vocabulary of Frank Sheehan. He staked out his position and he defended that position with his heart and his soul and his mind.

Most of the attributes that he had can be found in the members of the family, whether they are siblings or whether they are children. Frank set a tough standard for members of the family, and they lived up to it. We’re extremely grateful to the family for sharing Frank with us in the Legislative Assembly for a period of time.

Members of the Legislature—there are lot of people who will sit on the sidelines and throw rocks at those who are in public office. I always admire a person who will put his or her views on the line and run for public office, and Frank did, for the Roman Catholic Separate School Board in Lincoln, and later for the Legislative Assembly. Then he took on a tough fight against another icon in the Niagara Peninsula by the name of Peter Kormos. He wasn’t afraid to take on that fight and he wasn’t afraid to lose, if he knew he was going to go down standing for something he believed in.

I can speak for our community, and I think our Legislature, in saying that we were a better place in here and a

better place in our community because of the generous contribution that Frank Sheehan made to St. Catharines and Niagara, to the province of Ontario and to our country.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further tribute?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Francis Xavier Sheehan was one of 10 kids in his family. As Mr. Bradley noted, the first three, the elder three sisters, were all literally sisters—they're nuns—and two Basilian priests as brothers. So when Frank passed, he certainly had a lot of folks who could put a good word in for him to get through the Pearly Gates.

But I think Frank made it on his own, so I'm going to tell you a little bit about why I can say that. Believe it or not, Frank actually did follow the family tradition and enrolled in seminary. He was there for six months. It didn't take. There was a little too much mischief, I think, in those eyes, to all those who knew Frank, for it to last. Eldest son Gordon said, "Thank God it didn't," or the gallery would be less full today.

Frank had an extraordinarily big heart. He came back from seminary and he was trying to figure out what to do with the rest of his life and, as was mentioned by my colleague from Niagara Centre, he went to work for his dad in the Sheehan Plumbing and Heating business in St. Catharines. I didn't know Frank's dad, but I'm going to guess they were quite similar, because Gordon related a conversation to me where Frank came on board and it just didn't take, it didn't work out so much in the business. So his dad said to him one day, "You know, Francis, you've got a big mouth." Francis replied, "Well, you paid enough for it." Then dad said, "I don't think this is working out." Frank said, "Me, neither," and he up and quit. A little while later his dad said, "Frank, what do you want to do with the rest of your life?" Frank said, "I don't know." So he said, "Why don't you go and join your uncle?" Uncle Hubert had just taken over the family insurance business, Sheehan Insurance. Frank said, "I don't know anything about insurance." His dad said, "Neither does Hubert, so why don't you go ahead?" And that took.

Frank was a legend in the insurance business. He built up Sheehan and Rosie. He was extraordinarily generous, through the company and through himself. He took a leadership position provincially—I think nationally, if memory serves—with the insurance brokers as well, and then found his way here in 1995 in the cast of 82 characters we called the government, in June 1995.

1100

Premier Mike Harris is here today. It's no surprise to see the Premier here, because he said he looked at his entire team, and the one person in his caucus who had the principles and the backbone to be his leader of the Red Tape Commission, by and far—easy call—was Frank Sheehan. He made the right call.

I'll tell you a quick story. In cabinet one day—and Frank was there. To Premier Harris's credit, the head of the Red Tape Commission was at those cabinet meetings. One veteran minister—not present company; no longer

here in the assembly—was bringing through a new bill. The bill had all kinds of new rules and regulations in it. Frank took them on, right there at the cabinet table, and said, "This has got to go through" what he called "a regulatory knothole." That was his term.

The minister got frustrated. "Who is this? He's not a minister. What's he doing at the table? I can get what I want." The minister actually said, "We're just getting rid of red tape and doing blue tape instead." Premier Harris said, "That's exactly the point," and Frank got his way.

Then, as cabinet, we knew what the ballgame was. We took Frank seriously, the committee work that he did. You had to get his blessing to get a bill through. Then, after all those years, he kicked down 2,100 unnecessary government regulations. Fifteen red-tape bills actually passed here in the assembly.

An interesting thing about Frank, too—because he was not a big-government guy—he had tremendous respect for the civil service.

He actually compared reducing red tape to teaching elephants to dance. He said, "It's really hard, but when you get it done, it's an awesome spectacle."

Frank got it done. I spoke with Bill Mantel, a current ADM, who was one of the key people on the Red Tape Commission and a respected civil servant. I said, "Bill, why did this work?" He said, "Because of two reasons: Frank didn't suffer fools. He wouldn't take no for an answer."

He made progress. If a minister was not following the line that Premier Harris laid out, Frank would end the meeting and walk out on the minister. That sends a signal pretty fast. It also gave ministries an opportunity to actually get stuff done that otherwise they wouldn't. There was tremendous respect for what Frank did and for his leadership, not only on the political level but throughout the civil service.

One story I'll quickly tell: Frank and I also had a huge fight. I probably would have lost that fight, because it's hard to think of another more determined, focused and driven individual I've had the honour of serving with here in the assembly. It was because our ridings came together in 1999. Here I was, coming from Erie; Frank was Lincoln. The two ridings merged. A lot of MPPs fought. I said, "Holy crow, now I've got to take on Frank Sheehan. How's that going to work out for me, as a rookie MPP?"

Frank took me aside and put his arm around me. This conversation was probably in early 1999. He called me Timmy, like he was my football coach or something. He said, "Timmy, you've got a bright future in this business. I'm not going to run in Erie-Lincoln. And besides that, somebody's got to take on that socialist in cowboy boots next door." Frank took him on, and I think he gave Kormos a scare too, which is, I think, an incredible thing. Maybe that debate continues somewhere else today.

My colleagues talked about how Frank had a reputation for being gruff, tough-minded and determined, but they also talked, accurately, about how he had a big heart, in some personal stories.

There's a theme, too, that you pick up of the prodigal son, if you will, in Frank's good deeds. Wayside House helps recovering drug addicts get back on the straight and narrow. He was a big leader in the John Howard Society, helping people who had been in prison to get back on the right path.

Robert Land Academy is here today as well. I'm honoured to serve on their board. This is for young boys who have wandered away, to help bring them back. Frank was a regular guest there. In fact, headmaster Scott Bowman told me, "Frank would often tell the cadets some rather salty stories, but they loved it." When the headmaster tried to censor Frank and look at his remarks beforehand, Frank Sheehan never listened. They loved him at the Robert Land Academy. He was a guide for them, for a man of principle and the success he can have.

At the end of the day too, I think what was remarkable was—Jim mentioned his funeral—there were people there from all walks of life, all political parties. There was a wake, with lots of dignitaries there at the same time. It's because we always have this image of the politician who is a generous and public person but a miser with their own. Frank was the absolute opposite of that. He was that way not because he thought government was bad. He just believed that a lot of people didn't have much money left in their pockets after a lot was taken away. But he also had a big faith in humanity because Frank believed, too, that if more people had money in their pockets they would give generously, just like he did. He was, at his heart, an optimist and loved people.

A lot of folks wondered who among all of these dignitaries was going to make the big speech at the wake after the funeral. Gord decided Frank wouldn't want that. In Frank's life he always said that the good deeds speak for themselves; you don't wear them on your sleeve. That's exactly the most important lesson of what Frank Sheehan has taught us. Thanks for those good deeds. God bless. Thank you.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all the members for their kind, thoughtful and heartfelt comments. To the family, thank you for the gift of Frank. We will, as we have always done, provide you with a copy of Hansard and a DVD of today's testimonies. Thank you so much again for the life of Frank.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Just look at the parents here today at Queen's Park. These are parents with remarkable young children who just happen to have autism. Intensive behavioural intervention, IBI, has been a proven treatment for many of these children. The impact and progress made by these children using IBI programs is amazing and undeniable. Mr.

Speaker, why is the government turning their back on these children and these parents?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to welcome the parents and the children who are here. This is obviously an extremely important issue for all of us. We have for a number of years, as a government and as individuals within this government, worked with the organizations of parents working with children with autism to make the changes, as new science is discovered and as new programs are developed, to make sure that we provide to children the resources that they need.

What is unacceptable to us, Mr. Speaker, is that children would languish on a waiting list and not get service. That is what is happening now, and so it is incredibly important that we put the investments in place to help children get the services that they need. I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. What is unacceptable is these cuts to families with autism. I want to read you a quote from Lisa Meunier that was in the Canadian Press article written by Allison Jones. Ms. Meunier is a Brampton mom who has a nearly five-year-old daughter who has been on the IBI wait-list for almost three years. She said that the government funding will only pay for a few weeks of therapy. She said, "I'm disappointed that the government would do that to our children," and that "there is therapy out there that can help our children and now they're just taking that away from them."

Mr. Speaker, the Premier can't let these children and parents down. It's not the Ontario way. It's not acceptable. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do the right thing? Will she reinstate proper funding for IBI treatment?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think all of us know that with the prevalence of autism increasing, which is in and of itself a huge challenge—I know that there's work going on in our laboratories here in Ontario to look at the genetics, Mr. Speaker, to find answers to why this is happening and what the best treatment should be.

What has happened is that the wait times have increased and so the status quo is unacceptable. The Leader of the Opposition actually makes my point, because he talks about families whose children have been on that wait-list for three years. That's unacceptable because that window for the treatment closes. It is demonstrated that the efficacy of that intensive treatment is in the early years. That's why our budget makes a historic \$333-million investment. We're putting in place a new autism program, Mr. Speaker. It will give 16,000 more children access to services and it will provide a continuum of intensive services—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Final supplementary.

1110

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: This government's approach is to remove people outright from the wait-list. That's not solving the wait-list. There wouldn't be thousands and thousands of families irate about this if

it wasn't affecting the services that they desperately needed for their children.

The changes to IBI have been called destructive. Families have been left in the dark. Just listen to what Joseph Daley of the Grimsby Lincoln News said: "The policy changes of the Ontario government are condemning my child to a life of ongoing illness on top of the challenges he will face as an autistic individual."

Thousands and thousands of families are telling the Premier her changes are dead wrong. Does the Premier agree with the fundamental principle that autism doesn't end at age 5?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker—absolutely. What this program recognizes is exactly that: that there needs to be a continuum of service. So we cut the wait times in half and 16,000 more children get service. The families—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin-Caledon, come to order please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The children who have been languishing on the wait-list and who we are letting down at this moment, because the status quo is letting them down, will transition off the wait-list—\$8,000 initially—and then they will be eligible for the new autism program that will have intensive ABA and will recognize that there's a continuum of intensive service that is necessary. That's what the new program will provide: a continuity of service. That is what the best science is telling us is necessary.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on autism, let's try something else.

I was very disappointed with the meeting that occurred yesterday on the Liberal donation scandal. It was a Liberal PR stunt. I can tell you, despite the meeting being a sham, that we will not back down. We will not be bullied into dropping our request for a public inquiry.

Yesterday, the Premier claimed that political donations have never bought a policy in her government. This comes despite numerous examples that are causing the public to question this government's integrity.

So let's try it another way. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: Has the Premier ever given out a government grant in exchange for future political donations? Yes or no?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Again, I'm going to take the time to remind members that impugning motive takes different characteristics, and it's getting closer. I'm going to remind the member to guard his questions.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is no. That's not how decisions are made in our government. There are very clear protocols and processes.

Look, I'm committed to changing political donations in Ontario. There's a broad consensus on the actions that

need to be taken to update Ontario's rules. In fact, I had a meeting with the leader of the Green Party this morning, and he brought in a set of proposals that were very reflective of the proposals that I had brought to the leaders yesterday. I think that there is a broad consensus. This consensus is the basis of what I brought forward to the leaders of the opposition.

It's interesting to me; in preparation for what I deemed to be an important meeting with the leaders of the opposition, I did some work at home getting ready for the meeting. Somehow, that's an unacceptable thing. Well, I don't know how the leaders of the opposition parties work, but it was an important meeting. I brought some proposals forward looking at all—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Wrap up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I did some preparatory work to bring forward some proposals based on what I saw as the consensus in all of the discussion and in other jurisdictions in the hope that we would have a substantive discussion about those issues.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: I recognize that the Premier wants me to drop my request for a public inquiry, but I will continue to raise examples in the Legislature and around Ontario for exactly why we need a public inquiry. So let's start with another one today.

In October 2013, the Liberals quietly gave Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment \$500,000. That's a \$2.25-billion company that the Liberals gave public money to; the world's second wealthiest sporting organization. They didn't announce this grant, they just quietly handed the money over and, surprise, surprise, MLSE turned around and donated nearly \$30,000 despite never donating to any political party before.

Did the Premier, a member of her staff, an MPP—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the deputy House leader to refrain and to withdraw.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

It is a testimony to what I've been trying to ask you to do: to guard your questions and comments. This place is not the place to impugn motive.

Please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Did the Premier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Does the member from Renfrew care to challenge the Chair?

Mr. John Yakabuski: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Then don't say anything.

Carry on.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Did the Premier or a member of her staff pressure MLSE in any way to donate to the Liberal Party in exchange for that \$500,000?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition—I know he is going to continue to ask for a public inquiry. I've been very clear that

this whole discussion is born of a need to modernize the rules, to update the fundraising rules, and that's what we're going to do.

I brought forward a set of proposals yesterday. I've proposed reform of third-party advertising rules; a ban on corporate union donations; a reduction of maximum allowable donations to a figure that's in the range of what's permitted federally for each party; constraints on loans and loan guarantees to parties and candidates, including leadership candidates; reform of by-election donation rules; overall reduction in spending limits by central parties in election periods; and the introduction of limits—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds—Grenville, second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: And finally, the introduction of leadership and nomination campaign spending limits.

I came to the meeting with those seven reforms. I wanted to have a conversation about their perceptions of those. I still hope that we will get some substantive feedback from the leaders.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The donations to the Liberal Party included the maximum in the Sudbury by-election using the loophole they now suddenly want to close. The Premier would never propose a solution to a problem that did not exist. Nearly \$30,000 in donations starting immediately after receiving a government grant sure seems like a problem to me.

How many examples do I need to raise day after day in the Legislature of these shady dealings, of these shady fundraising techniques, before the Premier supports our call for a public inquiry into her party's political fundraising?

Will the Premier give us one justification, one reason, why she doesn't want this public inquiry? Why hide from it if you have nothing that you're trying to cover up?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

The leader will withdraw.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been very clear. As far back as last June, I said that we needed to move on the changes for funding donations—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Essex, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've brought forward a proposal and, on top of the substantial changes, I've said that we need to have a process that will allow public input from across the province.

I suggested to the leaders yesterday, and to the leader of the Green Party today, that we bring draft legislation forward this spring and that we send that draft legislation to committee after first reading rather than after second

reading. That allows the whole summer for consultation around the province and then another round of consultation after second reading.

This morning, the leader of the Green Party said that it might be a good idea for the House leaders to talk about how to maximize the input in those committee hearings. My experience on committee was that the discussion was truncated. I think it would be a good discussion for the House leaders to have on how we could maximize the input from the public as part of those committee hearings.

1120

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. This morning, my children and youth services critic, the MPP for Hamilton Mountain, was joined by Dr. James Porter, Kristen Ellison and Heather Bourdon. They came to Queen's Park along with hundreds of other parents to sound the alarm about this Premier's decision to take away essential therapy from kids with autism over the age of five.

They told heartbreaking stories of waiting for years, only to learn that their children will now never receive access to those services. We heard about the negative long-term impacts of this government's decision to create a lost generation of kids with autism spectrum disorder. All children with ASD deserve better from a Premier who once claimed, "Every Ontarian with autism deserves our support and has mine."

My question is a simple one: Can the Premier look up to all of these families in the gallery and tell them why she doesn't think their kids are worth the investment?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Children and Youth Services is going to want to comment on this, but I can look into the eyes of every one of the parents here and say that I don't want your children languishing on a wait-list indefinitely. I want your children to get intensive service. I want your children to have access to the services that are going to help them. That's why we're making these changes, because I, unlike the NDP, am not willing to have those kids languish on a wait-list.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. A reminder on all sides that the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A reminder on all sides that the debate—start the clock—is through the Chair. There's a reason for that, and you know what it is. Stay to it, please.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm sure they would respond that what they don't want is for the Premier to kick their kids off the waiting list.

Liberal members need to imagine what they would do if this decision was impacting their children: knowing that there is intervention available that could help your

child communicate to the outside world and hearing, after years of waiting, that your child will finally access this service, then having the rug pulled out from under you. With the stroke of this Premier's pen, your child will never receive access to those services. What would you do? Would you fight for your child? You absolutely would. Liberal members have a duty to fight for all children with autism spectrum disorder. They need to tell the Premier and the minister to stand up for kids.

So, again, I ask this Premier: Tell the parents today that are here why their kids don't deserve this life-changing therapy.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's why we're putting \$330 million into creating a new Ontario autism program: \$330 million more because children are languishing on waiting lists, because children need intensive therapy, because there is a continuum of therapy that is needed, because we need to make sure that children come off the waiting list and get immediate support—which is what the \$8,000 is—and then have access to a new intensive program that will allow them to get the service that they need. That is a far better situation than a situation where a child is sitting on a waiting list not getting the therapy and the window for when that intensive therapy would be successful is closing. I am not willing, as the Premier, to allow that window to close on thousands of children. They need that therapy. That's why we're putting this program in place.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Liberals have promised changes to services in autism spectrum disorder for 14 years, since I was the critic of children and youth services in this House. Fourteen years ago they promised that they would put services in schools to help these kids, and the services are not there today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The members will come to order.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So it is not surprising, then, that the families in this room and elsewhere across this province do not trust this Liberal government for one minute that their kids are going to see the services that they need. The bottom line is: Clearing the list to put out a headline that you don't have a list anymore is not the right way to treat children with autism in this province.

This Premier needs to step up to the plate and promise these kids who are currently on the list that they will be grandfathered into any new system and get the autism services, the IBI therapy, that they need to be able to communicate with the outside world. Will she step up and do the right thing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Now, to the minister.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you. I'm glad to have the opportunity to answer questions in front of the parents who are here today.

Speaker, I know that change is difficult for families. I know that first-hand. I know—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to ask and advise our guests that while we want you here, any displays are not allowed from the public gallery. I would appreciate it if you resisted doing so.

Minister.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I know that this change affects a number of families across the province, in addition to the families and the children that are here today.

We are changing the program because we are following the best scientific evidence. In addition to 330 million new dollars, we are creating 16,000 new spaces for children to get those critical interventions when they need it the most.

That's why we are working very hard to reach out to parents. We are holding webinars. We started one last night, and we had over 500 parents participating. We have four more webinars to come.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier said yesterday that her plan to change political fundraising was "non-partisan" and that she wanted to work with the other parties. But then she told the media that she actually wrote this plan by herself, at her dining room table, on the weekend.

To add to that, she wants any consultation to happen—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To add to that, she wants any consultation to happen on a committee, with a Liberal majority, where the Liberal Party can outvote anything that the Premier doesn't like when it comes to amendments.

Does this Premier honestly believe that's a process that the people of Ontario will respect and have confidence in?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said to the Leader of the Opposition, I did prepare for the meeting with the leaders. I prepared a set of proposals, looking at the regimes in other jurisdictions, looking at the commentary that had been made in the public, and I brought those proposals to my meeting with the leaders. I would expect that anyone going into an important meeting would prepare for that meeting.

I was quite prepared to hear substantive proposals coming from the other side, coming from the opposition

leaders. There were a number of questions that I put on the table, Mr. Speaker, and I made it clear to the leaders of the opposition parties, as I did to the leader of the Green Party this morning, that in the committee process that we are proposing, we would bring draft legislation forward this spring. We would send that legislation, with agreement of the House, to the committee after first reading, as opposed to second reading, so that there would be two rounds of consultations around the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: At any given time, this Premier has dozens of expert advisory panels on the go. There were panels whose job it was to study the reports made by other panels. But when it comes to ensuring that people can trust the basic fairness of our democracy, this Premier is refusing to establish a fast-moving, non-partisan and transparent panel.

Can the Premier explain, when it comes to an issue of such import as how election campaigns are funded, why she's refusing the input of a non-partisan expert panel that includes political parties, civil society and NGOs?

1130

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: A couple of things on this: First of all, I believe that there is a fair degree of consensus on where we need to go. As I said, when I met with the leader of the Green Party this morning, the suggestions that he brought forward were very much in sync with the proposal that I had brought to the leaders of the opposition parties. Now, I don't know where the leaders of the opposition parties stand substantially on some of these things because they weren't willing to engage with me in a substantial discussion.

I believe that the process of a standing committee, having two rounds of consultation around the province—we've committed to inviting the Chief Electoral Officer as the first government delegate. I said to the leader of the Green Party this morning that we would ask him to come as the second delegate to the committee, once the draft legislation got to that process.

I believe that there is ample opportunity between now and into the fall for everyone who wants to weigh in on this to do so, and for us to make sure we get the best piece of legislation possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier insists that there's a broad public consensus for a plan that she wrote by herself at her table over the weekend. Can she tell Ontarians, perhaps, what public meetings on campaign financing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Leader?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Can she tell Ontarians what public meetings on campaign financing she's attended? How many Ontarians has she consulted with? Which NGOs, which academics and which civil society groups made submissions to her in the development of her at-home-table document that she provided?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Here's what I'm not willing to do: I'm not willing to delay this process by layering on process and the creation of new committees. We have a completely legitimate process. In fact, it's the definition of the democratic process that this Legislative Assembly draft legislation and that we do that in consultation with people around the province. We do that, and then we send that draft legislation to consultation.

What the leader of the third party is proposing is that another process be put in place, after which legislation would be drafted, after which there would be consultation. So in order to get changes in place by the beginning of January 2017—that would be impossible. That is what the leader of the third party is proposing. We're not willing to do that.

I think there's been a lot of discussion. There needs to be more, but it needs to be on a substantial set of proposals. I'd like to get moving on that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Last week, I shared stories from families that are devastated because of your decision to stop providing IBI therapy to children over five years old. Some of those families have joined us here today and are looking to you for answers.

One family shared their story about their son, John Paul. In October 2015, one month prior to turning five, John Paul finally began IBI therapy after waiting for nearly three years. Prior to receiving IBI therapy, he wasn't able to say a word. Now, after a couple of months, he's using sentences. Now the minister will be stripping away this IBI support for John Paul and other children just because they're five. John Paul's experience clearly shows that IBI is working.

Will the minister do the right thing and reverse her decision and allow children over the age of five access to IBI therapy?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank my critic from the opposition party for this very important question and, again, acknowledge the families that are here today. These parents here today, and others across the province and on our webinar last night with hundreds of parents, have heard me say that the clinical experts have advised us that intensive intervention is most effective for children under five. That means that children over five are not in the right developmental window for this service.

To help families with children over the age of five who are currently waiting for services, we are providing them with one-time funding of \$8,000. That will take children off the waiting list today and into immediate

service. Parents can buy the service immediately and the children will not have to wait. Once that money is spent, families can access or improve upon publicly funded autism services. It will continue to provide more service for a longer duration, tailored to the children's needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Webinars where you try to justify your decision are not what these parents are looking for. They want therapy for their kids.

I want to quote from another letter I received from a parent. He wrote, "It's unfortunate autism isn't given the same priority as cancer. Both do not have a cure. Both cost money to treat and manage. And both can be devastating for the families...."

"Whenever you're going to talk about limited funding for autism treatment, try replacing the word 'autism' with 'cancer' and read it for yourself. How does it sound? What would the reaction be if you read that statement in public?"

I agree. We would never push aside a cancer patient based on age, yet this is exactly what the minister is doing with children with ASD.

Will the minister reverse her decision and provide real support to the thousands of Ontario children waiting for IBI therapy today?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Again, I thank the member for the question. It's very important.

I know what it's like to have a child with special needs. When I was asked, as parliamentary assistant to then Minister of Children and Youth Services, to write the special-needs report, it was my honour and privilege to talk to families with special needs, with all kinds of disabilities, to help them get the information they needed, to help them navigate a far-too-complicated system, to help them figure out what the best evidence is, to help them determine when a diagnosis is appropriate, to help them get the services they needed. This is the most important piece of work I've ever done, Speaker.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you.

As Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services, my job is to advocate and support and protect children. My job is to follow the evidence and provide the best possible—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Premier. We have hundreds of parents here today who told us that

they are mourning the death of their children's potential due to this government's decision. It's unacceptable that kids who waited because of this government's misplaced priorities are now being forced to pay the price again. This government is failing kids and families with ASD. This government is pulling the rug out from families who were about to receive that very important therapy. They deserve better. This shouldn't be about money. This should be about kids and their well-being.

Will the Premier do the right thing and ensure that kids who were on the wait-list will be grandfathered into the program?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is a gut-wrenching issue. I think it's obvious that there is huge emotional investment by every one of the families here and the thousands of families across the province.

I've been the Minister of Education. I worked with the then Minister of Children and Youth Services. We made changes in the autism program. The demographics have changed. There are more children who are born with autism, who are born on the spectrum. We have to continue to change the program so that it meets the needs of the kids who are in our society. We need to make sure that children don't languish on a wait-list.

What really worries me about what the opposition parties are proposing is that—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, it really does because what it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier?

1140

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is unacceptable to me that we would allow a situation to continue that allows children to languish on a wait-list and get no service. That is unacceptable. We're not going to let that continue.

Miss Monique Taylor: Speaker, what's unacceptable is that this Premier is doing that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have to acknowledge you first.

Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. This government created the wait-list by not investing in children with ASD. Now children over five are going to pay the price for this government's mistake, and that's unacceptable.

We had experts here today who told the government very clearly about their failures. These families travelled from all over the province to make their voices heard. Will the Premier listen to them today? Will she look at families today and tell them that she will do the right thing and grandfather children over the age of five?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I say to the families here is that we need to get this right. We need 16,000 more kids to get service, and we need every child—every child—with autism to get the services that they need. There is a continuum of intensity that is needed, Mr. Speaker.

What we're doing is providing money immediately so that parents can buy those services, but that's not the end of it. The continuum is that they then will be able to get into the new program, which will provide a range of intense programming. That's what the ABA service is.

I want every child in this province to have the right services. I don't want them languishing on wait-lists. I don't want them to miss that window of opportunity where services will be most successful. That's why we're making these changes. That's why we're making this very important investment.

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I explained before, there can be no outbursts at all. I'm going to ask the person to leave, please.

If anyone else continues, I'll have sections of galleries removed. Please, no demonstrations.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. As we discussed this morning, there are many families that are here with us in the Legislature. While many of these families, and families in my riding of Ottawa South, initially welcomed the government's announcement to provide \$333 million in new funding for autism services, many of these parents feel betrayed and confused about how this funding will be used and what impact these changes will have on their children.

I know, and we've heard this morning, that they're particularly concerned about children over the age of five and about what will happen to their children, some of whom have been on a waiting list for many, many years.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please inform this House about whether we will be discontinuing services for children with autism over the age of five?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I thank the member from Ottawa South for the important question.

There has been confusion about the improvements that we're making to autism services in Ontario. I want to be crystal clear: The government is absolutely not discontinuing services for children with autism who are over the age of five. We're focusing on the scientific evidence; we're focusing on what the experts tell us is the best outcome for all children on the autism spectrum.

What we are doing is getting children—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. The member from Leeds–Grenville is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: What we are doing is providing those families with one-time funding of \$8,000,

and when that money is spent, they'll enter into an improved autism program that's based on the latest science. The new program will provide services to children over the age of five that are intensive, available for a longer period of time and, most importantly, tailored to the individual child's needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm encouraged to hear that we will be continuing to support children over the age of five, and that these children will receive services immediately.

I would like to assure the leader of the third party that members on this side of the House, as well as on all sides of this House, advocate for families with autism. I want to make sure that that's clear to her. Don't try to take ownership of that.

In the interest of getting the information that people need, can the minister please explain to us, lay out to us, the program that will continue to support older children with autism coming forward in Ontario, the new Ontario Autism Program?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Again, thank you to the member for the important question.

There are a few points I want to make. First, the new program will be simpler to access. We know it hasn't been the easiest system to navigate.

There won't be two different streams, Speaker. Over time, there will be one stream. When a child enters the program, a clinician will assess their particular developmental needs. Each child's program will be tailored to meet those needs—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton Mountain, come to order.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: —regardless of their age. While the new program—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Right after I asked her, she continues. The member from Hamilton Mountain, second time.

Carry on.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Mr. Speaker, while the new program won't be called IBI any longer, children of any age who need those more intensive interventions will receive the level of intensity they need, delivered better than it was under the old program.

It also means 16,000 more children will have access to services. Within two years, the wait times for services will be cut in half, and I hope we'll get it down to six months by 2021.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Mr. Norm Miller: Mr. Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Premier. The ongoing state of emergency in Attawapiskat is more than alarming. When listening to first-hand accounts of the challenges of life on-reserve, and the mental health struggles the community is facing, you would hardly believe that such conditions could exist

in Ontario. Speaker, would the Premier explain what is being done to assist the community of Attawapiskat at this time of crisis?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, this is a very tragic situation. What has happened with the situation is that yesterday there was an emergency response team from Ontario that arrived in Attawapiskat at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. It consists of a team of mental health experts, youth specialists and other mental health workers. They're doing an immediate assessment of the situation.

In addition to that, the Mushkegowuk tribal council has a health response team that also has responded to Attawapiskat, which, of course, is on James Bay. In addition to that, on Sunday the federal government sent in a couple of experts to deal with this crisis.

On Wednesday, the Ontario Minister of Health and the Minister of Children and Youth Services are going to Attawapiskat, where they will receive an assessment from the experts that are there today. From there, we will proceed to a long-term—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Again, through you, Speaker, to the Premier: I commend the government for sending resources immediately. It's the right thing to do. But this is the fifth state of emergency that the community of Attawapiskat has declared in the past 10 years. Systemic issues with inadequate housing, flood control, access to clean drinking water and sub-par education resources have plagued the community. Sadly, these issues stretch well beyond one isolated First Nation reserve on the James Bay coast.

Speaker, would the Premier explain how we can break this cycle of crisis, ensure that the current efforts have a lasting impact, and provide hope for young people growing up in Attawapiskat and other remote First Nations communities?

Hon. David Zimmer: Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Together with the Minister of Children and Youth Services, I am going to Attawapiskat tomorrow morning. We're going to be joined on that trip by the national chief, Perry Bellegarde, who represents our Assembly of First Nations, as well as the regional chief, Isadore Day, who is the health representative for AFN in this province.

1150

I have to say that I and all of us on the government side, and I think all of us in the Legislature, were absolutely devastated when we heard the news of the 11 suicide attempts that occurred on Saturday alone. Ten out of those 11 were young people.

I have to say that we're working extremely well, and closely, not only with First Nations but with the federal government, and that change in the relationship has been welcomed by all parties, I think. I know that in 2012, Patrick Brown's government closed the National Aboriginal Health Organization—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

FUNDRAISING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. This weekend, the Premier sat at home and wrote a plan that's going to impact the democracy of over 14 million Ontarians. This change is presumably going to take some lengthy legislation to actually enact. The Premier has promised to bring forward this legislation by May. That's only three weeks away.

My question is, how much of the work had already begun on this legislation before the Premier actually sat down with the leaders of the NDP and the PCs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've explained, I was preparing for an important meeting with the leaders of the opposition parties. I was looking at the rules in other jurisdictions, I was looking at the issues that had been raised in the public discussion and I was preparing to bring forward some proposals and to ask some questions of the leaders of the opposition.

Actually, I would have expected that the leaders of the opposition parties would have been doing the same thing, that they would have been preparing for a meeting and preparing for a substantial conversation.

In any case, the legislation has not yet been drafted. It is in process. We propose that we bring legislation forward in the spring. I hope that I will hear from the leaders of the opposition, as I have heard from the leader of the Green Party, on what their substantial input might be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We already know that during the budget process, the Liberals had already drafted the budget before the pre-budget consultations had been completed. We know that the Premier clearly does not agree with the principle of consulting first and writing legislation afterwards.

Now, with this issue, it seems that we have the same result again. The Premier has already indicated that some of the process has already begun on the drafting of this legislation, so this was done before the Premier has consulted with anyone else, before consulting with non-partisan experts, before consulting with party leaders of other political parties, before consulting with civil society and before consulting with Ontarians in general.

My question is this: How much of the process has already been completed, which you just indicated? How much of the legislation has already been completed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're certainly hearing a critique on the process, but let's talk about the substance. The Premier has put forward a number of proposals, and I think we need to actually talk about the substance.

Do they believe that we need to reform third-party advertising rules and have maximum spending limits on third-party advertising? Yes or no?

Do the opposition parties agree that we should ban union donations and ban corporate donations? Yes or no?

Do the opposition parties believe that we need to reduce the maximum amount for donations? Yes or no?

Speaker, do they believe that we need to have constraints on loans and loan guarantees? Yes or no?

Do they believe that we need to reform the by-election donation rules? Yes or no?

We have substantive proposals. We want the input from the opposition. We would like to know what—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Harinder Malhi: My question is for the Minister of Energy. This government has been dedicated to making decisions that benefit Ontario and Ontarians, now and in the future. When you look at the proposals in the 2016 budget introduced last week, this mandate is very clear. The government is continuing to be a leader by taking action on climate change and investing in an electricity system that is clean and reliable.

Constituents in Brampton–Springdale that I represent have questions about the makeup of our energy system. They are often surprised and very pleased to learn that 90% of energy generated in Ontario is greenhouse gas emission-free. This impressive statistic is our reality in Ontario due to the serious commitment and leadership from this government.

Minister, can you please share the details of how investing in clean electricity infrastructure will benefit our province?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member from Brampton–Springdale for the question.

Our government is continuing to enhance the electricity sector to improve ratepayer and customer experience. We were the first jurisdiction in North America to eliminate coal-fired electricity and, since 2003, have invested more than \$34 billion in clean energy and more reliable transmission.

We're moving forward with major nuclear refurbishment at Darlington and Bruce Power with an affordable average price into the grid of about 7.7 cents per kilowatt hour, all 100% emissions-free. Refurbishment is estimated to create nearly \$10 billion in annual economic activity and create 60,000 jobs over the period. Continued operations at Pickering will avoid eight million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and save electricity consumers over \$600 million annually.

There's a lot more, Mr. Speaker, and I'll speak to that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Thank you to the minister for explaining the significant value that these investments in clean energy have had and will have. Ontario's participation in the low-carbon economy is key to remaining part of the leader pack of jurisdictions that excel at modernization and innovation.

While these efforts to move further toward a low-carbon economy through the cap-and-trade initiative must

be a priority, with change brings questions about how people and business will adapt. As this government has clarified many times, electricity rates will not increase due to cap-and-trade, since Ontario has designed an electricity system that is almost entirely GHG-free. Beyond this, the government has also introduced several initiatives to mitigate the costs that consumers have to pay for clean, reliable electricity.

Minister, can you please share with the House how your ministry is working on managing the cost of electricity for consumers?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We have introduced a number of measures to help ratepayers manage their electricity costs. We removed the debt retirement charge off all residential bills, with commercial and industrial users coming off in April 2018.

We introduced the Ontario energy support program for low- and middle-income households, saving qualifying families \$430 annually when combined with the debt retirement charge. For small businesses, we've introduced a five-point energy savings plan, providing the tools for small and medium businesses to conserve and save on their energy costs.

We expanded the industrial conservation initiative, encouraging more of Ontario's largest energy users to reduce their electricity use during peak periods. Since July 2015, more than 280 additional companies have been added and are saving 25% on their electricity bills through this expanded conservation program.

Our work to support ratepayers is working, and we're determined to continue.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question today is for the Premier. Late last week, the National Post exposed a secret report on the nearly \$5 billion a year Ontario spends on business subsidies. This report concluded, "Ontario's business support programs favour the largest and oldest companies, the companies least likely to be in need of support."

The Auditor General has already confirmed that companies are hand-picked by the Liberal government to receive grants, and the government doesn't even track the results of the nearly \$5 billion spent per year. I've been calling on the Minister of Economic Development since January to make public all past grants, and I'm still waiting.

So my question this morning is simple: Will the Premier make public all grants handed out to private companies under the Liberal government? If not, what is she hiding?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: We're happy to share publicly all of the investments that we've made with businesses across this province. In all, we've invested \$2.8 billion. That has leveraged \$29 billion in private sector investment here in Ontario, rather than somewhere else in the

world. That's 160,000 Ontarians whose jobs have either been created or supported as a result of these investments.

The question I think Ontarians need to ask is where does the member's leader stand on this? Does he stand with his critic, who we know is a philosophically challenged critic on these issues? Or does he stand where he used to stand when he was an MP in Ottawa? I have pictures with the Leader of the Opposition—which I won't show, Mr. Speaker—in Barrie at an IBM investment, just like all the other investments we've made, where he's praising the investments we've made. Where does the leader stand—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Supplementary?

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Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm glad that the government has finally acknowledged and agreed that they will present the list. We just want to know when this list will be exposed and where we can find it.

Of the \$5 billion per year in business support programs, we know that the largest and most successful companies across Ontario receive the lion's share of this funding. We also know that the Ministry of Economic Development has no idea whether the money being spent is actually creating jobs or helping our economy. What's more, much of that money was spent with no public application process, and instead the Minister of Economic Development and the Premier hand-pick companies that would receive the payouts behind closed doors by invitation only.

There's a shockingly high number of Liberal Party donors who have also received corporate welfare. Will the Premier clear the air and tell us which companies were invited to apply for this money and why? Did she simply use a list of Liberal Party donors? Or will it take a public inquiry?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think Ontarians are getting very curious about where the Leader of the Opposition stands on the \$2.8 billion that we've invested to accrue \$29 billion in private sector investment and create or support 160,000 jobs.

I'm going to send over a great picture of the Leader of the Opposition holding a ribbon we were cutting in Barrie for one of those investments. This is what he had to say that day: "The advanced knowledge coming from the collaborative research and innovation platform funded by our government"—he's referring to the federal—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry can move chairs, but I'm still going to get you.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Let me finish the quote. The Leader of the Opposition goes on to say, "This will be a strategic asset for Canada to advance homegrown innovation on the world stage."

We're building up our innovation, we're building up companies, we're creating jobs, and we'll do so with or without the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Education. As we know, budget 2016 again squandered the Liberal government's chance to be a leader on child care. Worst of all, its new child care regulations put our youngest children with much older children and fewer staff. Apparently, this government believes that a 12-month-old child is a toddler. The Premier and her government are failing families in Ontario. Parents, particularly women, are being forced to halt re-entering the workforce because they can't find a child care space. Speaker, can the minister explain why, in 2016, the government does not have a child care policy?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Well, in fact, we have a very extensive child care policy. We have consulted broadly with the sector. We have gotten rid of the old Day Nurseries Act—dramatically out of date—introduced a new Child Care and Early Years Act, which not only clarifies the regulations around licensed child care but puts into place a whole host of new laws and regulations, making child care in the unregulated home care sector much safer for parents. We have done more policy work on developing child care and early years policies than any other government in the last 30 years.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Child care providers, professionals in the sector and parents have all said that they do not support the regulation changes. And I need to point out that in the 2016 budget there is no money for child care. So much for a Premier and a minister who promised to make child care a priority.

My question is back to the minister: How long does it take to make a priority reality? Parents in Ontario are paying the highest child care costs in the country. Lists for subsidized care just keep getting longer. Hopefully they don't just start kicking people off, like they have with autism. Our most vulnerable families are struggling to ensure their children have access to quality, affordable child care. We know that the federal government isn't guaranteeing that provinces will get the funding that they promised. Can the minister confirm that Ontario will get the money for child care their friends in the federal government promised, yes or no?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, what I can speak to is our government's record on funding child care.

Since 2003-04, our government has doubled child care funding to more than \$1 billion annually. In 2016—this year—the ministry is providing over \$1.05 billion to 47 municipalities. That's an increase in funding of over \$16 million since last year, so the money continues to go up.

In addition to that, we are investing \$269 million over three years to subsidize the wages of our workers in the

child care sector. We started last year with a \$1-an-hour subsidy. This year, it goes to \$2 an hour. In the licensed home care sector, it goes from a \$10-a-day subsidy to a \$20-a-day subsidy.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: My question is for the minister responsible for women's issues, a dedicated and committed public servant with whom we are all proud to serve.

As the minister is aware, I was proud to serve on the Legislature's Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment. Our government has taken concrete action, including introducing legislation to improve supports for survivors and to address sexual violence and harassment on campuses across Ontario.

I'm proud to say that I have a group here from my riding today who are participating in the Equal Voice Girls Government program. The Rolling Meadows elementary school grade 8 girls' leadership group is here, along with their passionate and dedicated teachers, Tanya Ferro and Sandra Lumsden. I visited the school recently and learned that, while they're here, they've chosen to speak to Ontario's sexual violence and harassment action plan. Their presentation will focus on the need for enhanced information in the curriculum on issues like consent and on the #WhoWillYouHelp ads, seen by over 85 million people.

Speaker, through you, can the minister please inform the House about some of the ways the Women's Directorate supports survivors of sexual violence and harassment?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Burlington for her important question. I also want to thank her for her work on the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

I also want say thanks and hello to all the students who are here for Girls' Government. Members from all parties today have brought in girls from grades 6 to 8 for Girls Government day. It's fantastic.

Our sexual violence and harassment action plan and the related social media campaign have reached more than 84 million people. I'm so pleased that we were able to pass Bill 132 with the support of all parties.

More recently, we launched Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence against Indigenous Women. That's a \$100-million investment to implement that strategy.

Thanks to our Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign, more than 34,000 front-line professionals and service providers have received training to help detect domestic violence and to support victims.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer and for her leadership on these important issues.

Ontario is leading the way when it comes to addressing sexual violence and harassment against women, but I know that the minister's portfolio also includes priorities

beyond the important violence-against-women work that she does. The minister responsible for women's issues has repeatedly taken leadership on many issues that affect young women in Ontario, and I know that young women across this province appreciate her dedication.

Would the minister please inform the House, including the young women from my riding here today, about the programs that she oversees in the Ontario Women's Directorate that are focused on providing them with the tools and opportunities they need to achieve a brighter future?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Indeed, our government has taken steps to increase women's economic participation in a number of ways in our society. Ontario is the first Canadian jurisdiction to introduce the "comply or explain" amendments, which came into effect in December of 2014. Because of these regulations, companies listed on the TSX are now required to report publicly on their approach to increasing the number of women on their boards.

The Women's Directorate has a great micro-lending program, helping low-income women build and grow their own business. I've been up north and seen some of those programs in action. They're fantastic. It's providing more than 1,400 low-income women with the skills they need to start up and run a successful business.

We also have the Employment Training for Abused/At-Risk Women Program, which provides women with specialized supports. More than 3,000 women have participated in this program. So we're very committed to improving—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1210 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROSS BATTEN

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'd like to acknowledge today the passing of one of Whitby–Oshawa's great constituents, Ross Batten.

Ross was born on July 5, 1944, and spent much of his life in Ashburn, Ontario, just north of downtown Whitby. It's a hamlet in the northern portion of my riding.

Ross distinguished himself in the community as a town of Whitby councillor for 13 years, and as a region of Durham councillor for three years, as well. In addition to his presidency of the Kinsmen Club of Brooklin and District, Ross served for 15 years as a director, and then chairperson, of the Whitby Hydro Electric Corp.

Former MP and Whitby resident Judi Longfield said that Ross was always well-prepared for business meetings and was consistently fair in his examination of the issues that came before the board in his capacity as the chairperson of the planning and development committee at the town of Whitby. He always viewed the big picture

and constantly acted in the best interests of the stakeholders and the constituents that he served so well.

Gerry Emm, a former regional councillor that I served with and a good friend of Ross's, told me about a lighter moment in his political life. Gerry and Ross were partners in a boat-building and race-across-the-harbour challenge during Whitby's Harbour Day festival many years ago. After constructing a boat and successfully practising on a placid pond in Ashburn, where Gerry and Ross both lived, the actual event in the harbour was anything but placid. The twosome did not fare so well when confronted with winds and high waves in the bay of Whitby harbour. Their boat turned into a submarine very quickly that day.

Ross Batten was truly a kind and decent man. Our thoughts go out to his wife, Diane; children, Bradley and Deborah; his sister, Judy; his grandsons, Ryan and Craig; and his great-grandson, Lucas. A community leader, a planner for a better future within the town of Whitby and the region of Durham, and a proud father, Ross Batten will be recalled fondly.

PARAMEDICS COMPETITION

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Allow me to brag for a moment about a team of four Ontario paramedics who are training for an international competition next month in the Czech Republic. Thirty other teams from around the world will be there. It's a gruelling competition: It takes place over 24 straight hours, starting at 6 in the morning; the teams are thrown into a dozen life-and-death situations.

Only two teams from Canada were invited to compete. One is from BC; they are last year's international champions. Team Ontario members come from Windsor and Essex county. Captain Chris Kirwan comes from my riding of Windsor–Tecumseh. He is joined by Lance Huver, Nick Montaleone and Slav Pulcer. Mr. Pulcer is from my riding as well, while Mr. Huver lives in Amherstburg, and Mr. Montaleone is a resident of LaSalle; both towns are in the riding of Essex.

Mr. Kirwan is only 27, a graduate of the paramedic program at Windsor's St. Clair College, as are two of the other team members. Team captain Kirwan will be graduating from the University of Windsor this spring with a bachelor of science degree. They are all extraordinary young men.

I think it's great that Canada has an Ontario paramedic team in this international competition. As I said, it's in the Czech Republic and you can "Czech out" the two Canadian teams at teamcanadaeastwest.com.

ROYAL ST. GEORGE'S COLLEGE STUDENT PROJECTS

Mr. Han Dong: I rise today to recognize and celebrate the achievement of Royal St. George's College and their students, as they recently held their Foundation Year Projects.

The Foundation Year Projects challenged grade 9 Royal St. George's College students to address social and

environmental issues in our community. Students learned about the principles of social entrepreneurship and applied them to the creation of innovative solutions that addressed an issue of their choosing.

The resulting student-led initiatives included a children's book that aimed to combat racism in schools; an online educational resource hub for at-risk youth; a program to recycle used milk bags into a waterproof sleeping mat for the homeless; and the creation of a podcast that focused on increasing youth engagement in politics.

I'm very impressed with the innovation and creativity of these students. Their ability to identify these issues in our community and create solutions is truly remarkable. I commend the students at Royal St. George's College for their hard work and courage for taking on important social issues.

PERTH COUNTY FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: On Friday, April 1, the Perth County Federation of Agriculture held its annual federal-provincial forum. It has been an honour to attend the forum each and every year since I was first elected in 2011.

This year was no exception. Representatives from the PCFA, commodity and farm groups presented their ideas and concerns. I want to highlight just a few:

- the need to better support rural infrastructure;
- skyrocketing energy costs, and how the government's cap-and-trade will push fuel costs even higher above our competitors';
- the social licence to farm, and the need to bridge the knowledge gap among those without a farming background;
- a regulatory system too often influenced by special interests or political pressure, rather than science; and
- farmers' success in reducing carbon emissions by producing more with much less than they did in the past. For that, they don't get the credit they deserve.

I want to share an important statistic, which we heard at the forum from PCFA president Joanne Foster. In Ontario, there are 158,000 jobs in the farm sector, representing \$8.1 billion in wages and salaries, and 58% of these jobs are in rural areas. Let's never lose sight of just how important this industry is to communities across the province.

I want to thank Joanne, as well as Agnes Denham and everyone at the PCFA, for organizing the annual forum.

KOREY JARVIS

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today, I would like to highlight a young man from Elliot Lake who is about to have his dream finally come true.

Twenty-nine-year-old Korey Jarvis recently qualified to compete for Team Canada in wrestling at the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Jarvis

competed in the Canadian trials in Edmonton in December, defeating a Venezuelan wrestler to win a spot on Team Canada.

Jarvis began his wrestling career in grade 9 at Elliot Lake Secondary School. After high school, he moved to Guelph, where he continued to practise his sport. He made Team Canada and began competing on the international circuit.

What is most remarkable about Jarvis is his passion, dedication and perseverance despite several challenges. This was the third time that Jarvis has tried out for the Olympic team. In both 2008 and 2012, he came in third and needed a second-place finish in order to secure a place on the team. Jarvis did not give up and continued to train and compete, and now he has officially secured a place on the Canadian Olympic team.

As one can imagine, the time and dedication to a sport can be a very costly endeavour. To help Korey with these costs, please see my Facebook page for contact information.

As MPP for Algoma-Manitoulin, I can say that we are so proud of you, Korey, for your past accomplishments, and there will be a city, a riding, a province and a country behind you, cheering.

Best of luck to you, Korey. Now go kick some butt, Algoma-Manitoulin style.

KITCHENER RANGERS

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Madam Chair, I often stand before you and members of this House to share news with you about great initiatives and events that are happening in my riding of Kitchener Centre. But today, I want to alert you to a remarkable event that's going to happen right here in the Ontario Legislature—that's with your approval, of course—and that is that the Deputy Premier will soon be wearing the red, white and blue of the Kitchener Rangers.

1510

Tonight marks the third game in the OHL western conference semifinals between the Kitchener Rangers and the London Knights. To mark this occasion, the member from London North Centre and I have made a little wager. The losing representative is going to have to wear the opposing team's jersey at the end of the series.

Madam Speaker, I'm feeling pretty confident in this wager. How could I not? The Rangers have made it to the Memorial Cup tournament six times. They've won seven division titles. Over the years, the Rangers have had 145 alumni who have played in the NHL, five among them elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame, with such names as Bill Barber, Larry Robinson and Scott Stevens. Tonight, we're going to see the Rangers face off against the Knights again, this time in the great city of Kitchener.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to continuing this friendly discussion of the Rangers' supremacy over social media with the minister from London; too bad she's not here right now.

I hope that you will join me in cheering on these teams in the coming weeks. Go Rangers.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Last Friday, I had the privilege of meeting with past and present students, as well as their families, from Huron-Bruce who are fully supportive of both Robarts and Amethyst demonstration schools. It was heart-wrenching, listening to them and having them plead to us to make sure that the government opens their ears and hearts as to why this type of school is so, so important to grade 7 and 8 students throughout Ontario.

There was a footnote to it: They feel absolutely appalled that this government has chosen to cap enrolment, to wither down the number of students at the school. It reminded me very much of what happened with the Bluewater youth detention centre. It was exactly the same thing.

Most importantly, I want to leave some quotes with everyone in the House today. Rosie is an amazing little grade 7. She feels that Amethyst is building her confidence and her hope. Another student actually said, "It's important that the Premier realizes that I may sit in a room full of classmates, but I feel alone because I have to learn differently." That is not inclusion. They want to be amongst their peers, so that they can learn together and excel together, as opposed to being made to feel that they're different.

Ladies and gentlemen of the House, we need to do right on Thursday and support our demonstration schools in Ontario.

SILVER CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr. Yvan Baker: Today I rise to speak to an important issue in my riding of Etobicoke Centre. The Toronto District School Board is considering the sale of Silver Creek Public School. This is a very concerning development as the property includes green space important to our community and is home to two incredibly important organizations.

The Etobicoke Children's Centre provides invaluable services to children, youth and their families who experience challenges related to mental health and autism, and serves over 1,000 children and their families every year.

Silver Creek Pre-School serves approximately 70 children, most of whom have severe special needs. These services are vital to some of our most vulnerable children in our community and we must protect them.

I've been working closely with members of the local community, including the Friends of Silver Creek School and the Richmond Gardens Ratepayers and Residents Association, the leaders of Etobicoke Children's Centre and Silver Creek Pre-School, as well as our local councillor and TDSB trustee, to find a solution. I have met with TDSB representatives and spoken in our community and in this Legislature to advocate for the protection of these services. I've also been working with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to advocate for Silver Creek and determine what the provincial government can do.

I'm pleased to report that this has led to the government of Ontario responding to the TDSB in writing to express initial interest in the Silver Creek property. Essentially, the provincial government has stepped up and shown a strong desire to protect these crucial services within our community. Although there is still a lot of work to be done, this is certainly a step in the right direction.

I rise in the House today to thank the Friends of Silver Creek School and to thank members of my community for their passion and dedication to this cause. Let us hope that the TDSB does not sell the Silver Creek property, but should it do so, I will continue to do everything I can to protect these essential services in Etobicoke Centre.

AHLUL-BAYT ISLAMIC EDUCATION CENTRE

Mr. John Fraser: I had hoped to rise today and speak about a wonderful event I was at on Saturday night—the World Lebanese Cultural Union—but, sadly, I rise today to express our support to the students and the families of the Ahlul-Bayt Islamic Education Centre in Ottawa. On Monday morning, students, parents and teachers arrived to discover hateful messages spray-painted on the school wall. The students at Ahlul-Bayt are young, and these messages create fear.

To the families of Ahlul-Bayt, I want you to know that my colleagues and I, on all sides of this Legislature, strongly condemn this act. It is heartening to know that the school's neighbours quickly came to show their support, and indeed, across Ottawa there have been countless expressions of support for the Ahlul-Bayt school and the families it serves.

Here in this province, our strength is diversity. It is what has built our province up. I want the families to know that we stand with you and condemn this act and any other act inspired by hate.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Introduction of bills? The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to say, on Girls' Government Day, it's nice to see a woman in the chair. I hope you get your suit soon.

GIRLS' GOVERNMENT DAY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA JOURNÉE DU GOUVERNEMENT DES FILLES

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 183, An Act to proclaim Girls' Government Day /
Projet de loi 183, Loi proclamant la Journée du
gouvernement des filles.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member can have a brief statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: By proclaiming April 12 in each year as Girls' Government Day, the province of Ontario will create an important opportunity for girls and their elected representatives to come together. Girls' Government Day will complement the Girls' Government program, a non-partisan initiative aimed at addressing the issue of under-representation by creating more engaged political citizens, and will promote diversity and create opportunities for girls to have greater participation in the political process.

ISMAILI CENTRE, TORONTO, AGA KHAN MUSEUM AND AGA KHAN PARK ACT (TAX RELIEF), 2016

Mr. Baker moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr43, An Act respecting the Ismaili Centre,
Toronto, the Aga Khan Museum and the Aga Khan Park.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

LAWREN HARRIS DAY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE JOUR DE LAWREN HARRIS

Mr. Dong moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 184, An Act to proclaim Lawren Harris Day /
Projet de loi 184, Loi proclamant le Jour de Lawren
Harris.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Does the member have a brief introduction of the bill?

Mr. Han Dong: The bill proclaims October 23 in each year as Lawren Harris Day.

1520

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT (SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES (COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE SUR L'AIDE SOCIALE)

Mr. Paul Miller moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance

Research Commission / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires afin de créer la Commission de recherche sur l'aide sociale.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member: Would you like to make a brief statement?

Mr. Paul Miller: This bill amends the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the social assistance research commission. The commission recommends social assistance rates and makes other recommendations about social assistance policies. The commission consists of people with expertise relevant to the commission's work.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

"Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

"Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

"Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

"Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with Joshua. Thanks, House leader.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: I have all of these petitions from across Ontario, and they read as follows:

"Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I couldn't agree with this more, Madam Speaker. I will give it to page Ariel to bring to the Clerk—

Interjection.

Miss Monique Taylor: —even if the minister is heckling me.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here that's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children;

"Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

"In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To allow for deputations on ... private member's bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

"Once debated at committee to expedite" its progress through third reading and, finally, royal assent.

I agree with the petition. I affix my signature and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further petitions?

AUTOMOTIVE DEALERS

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have a petition here for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and I want to thank Steve Clark for beginning this petition.

"Whereas Bill 152, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2015 is a vital tool that supports Ontario's auto sector by cutting red tape for dealers and consumers when a vehicle is purchased or leased; and

"Whereas, in 2011, the province of Ontario conducted a pilot project on in-house vehicle licensing at two new car dealerships that was well received by the participants; and

"Whereas the province of Quebec has permitted automobile dealers to conduct in-house vehicle registrations since 2003, with 700 dealers currently participating;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario immediately pass Bill 152 into law, to promote Ontario's auto retail sector by cutting red tape for motor vehicle dealers and consumers to save them time and money.

Speaker, I support this petition, affix my name to it and send it down with Sohan.

PARENTAL RECOGNITION

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in 2006, Ontario Justice Paul Rivard ruled that the Children's Law Reform Act and the Vital Statistics Act, which govern birth registries, were 'clearly outdated,' legislative reform has not followed;

"Whereas Ontario lags behind four other provinces—British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec—that have already updated their LGBTQ parental recognition laws;

"Whereas in this province, same-sex couples—in addition to any family who does not have a conventional biological mother and father set-up at birth—are forced to either adopt or receive a declaration of parentage to attain legal protections over their children;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Pass Bill 137, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and other acts with respect to parental recognition."

Of course, I agree with this. It's discriminatory otherwise. I give it to Terry to be delivered to the table.

HOME INSPECTION INDUSTRY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition that is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the home inspector industry remains largely unregulated; and

"Whereas homeowners are increasingly reliant on home inspectors to make an educated home purchase; and

"Whereas the unregulated industry poses a risk to consumers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To protect consumers by regulating the home inspection industry and licensing home inspectors."

I agree with the petition, affix my signature and give it to Vanessa to bring down.

1530

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital is challenged to support the growing needs of the community within its existing space as it was built for a mere 7,000" emergency room visits per year "and experiences in excess of 33,000 visits annually; and

"Whereas the government-implemented Places to Grow Act forecasts massive population growth in New Tecumseth, which along with the aging population will only intensify the need for the redevelopment of the hospital; and

"Whereas all other hospital emergency facilities are more than 45 minutes away with no public transit available between those communities; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital deserves equitable servicing comparable to other Ontario hospitals;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government immediately provide the necessary funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital for the redevelopment of their emergency department, operating rooms, diagnostic imaging and laboratory to ensure that they can continue to provide stable and ongoing service to residents in our area."

I agree with this petition and I'll certainly sign it.

DENTAL CARE

M^{me} France G  linas: I have this petition and I want to thank Mr. Marc Brabant for signing it. It goes as follows:

“Whereas thousands of Ontarians live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

“Whereas the promised \$45-million dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

“Whereas the program was designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

“Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

“We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To do all in its power to stop the dental fund from being diverted to support other programs; and

“To fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to in need.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and pass it to Sohan to bring it down.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Granville Anderson: To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

“Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a decent work agenda by making sure that Ontario’s labour and employment laws:

“—require all workers be entitled to a starting wage that reflects a uniform, provincial minimum, regardless of a worker’s age, job or sector of employment;

“—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

“—ensure part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time, permanent counterparts;

“—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

“—support job security for workers when companies or contracts change ownership;

“—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temp agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

“—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

“—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

“—offer proactive enforcement of laws, supported by adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the law;

“—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

“—ensure all workers are paid at least \$15 an hour.”

I agree with this petition and I’ll affix my signature.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Steve Clark: I’ve got some more petitions supporting Ontario doctors, so I’ll just read the final paragraph:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I’m pleased to support this petition. I’ll affix my signature and send it to the table with page Sabrina.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s my pleasure to present this petition for the first time in the House today. It’s called “Ontario Needs to Fund Family-Created Housing.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government’s 2014 budget included a commitment to address the wait-list of more than 12,000 adults with developmental disabilities awaiting residential funding, and some of whom have been waiting more than 20 years; and

“Whereas since the spring of 2014 the number of adults with developmental disabilities awaiting residential funding has grown to more than 14,000; and

“Whereas there is currently no available funding to plan for a respectful transition from the family home to a home of choice in the community; and

“Whereas more than 1,450 Ontario parents over the age of 70 continue to provide primary care to their adult child; and

“Whereas currently adults with developmental disability must go on the crisis list before they receive residential funding, often resulting in a loss of choice, dignity and community; and

“Whereas family-created housing prioritizes dignity, choice and community inclusion for the resident living with disability as well as providing long-term cost savings for the province;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Minister of Community and Social Services to address the growing wait-list for adults with developmental disabilities awaiting residential funding and provide stable funding opportunities for family-created housing.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Terry.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime. When public education about sexual violence and harassment is not prioritized, myths and attitudes informed by misogyny become prevalent. This promotes rape culture.... Sexual violence and harassment survivors too often feel revictimized by the systems set in place to support them. The voices of survivors, in all their diversity, need to be amplified. Survivors too often face wait times for counselling services as our population grows....

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Support the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment's final report, highlighting the need for inclusive and open dialogue to address misogyny and rape culture; educate about sexual violence and harassment to promote social change...; and address attrition rates within our justice system, including examining 'unfounded' cases, developing enhanced prosecution models and providing free legal advice for survivors."

I agree with this petition, will put my initials to it and give it to page MacFarlane.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for petitions has now expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

JOBS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2016

LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT LA CRÉATION D'EMPLOIS POUR AUJOURD'HUI ET DEMAIN (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mr. Sousa moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statutes / Projet de loi 173, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter ou à modifier diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize Mr. Sousa.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016.

Mr. Speaker, the 2016 Ontario budget builds on the progress our government has made over the past eight years. Since the global recession of 2009, we have remained firm in our commitment to improve the provincial economy and to protect the public services that many Ontarians rely on.

In the 2015 budget, we established the four pillars that guide us on our journey to balance budgets. This four-part plan rests on (1) investing in people's talents and skills; (2) investment in public infrastructure; (3) creating the conditions to support innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses; and (4) building a secure retirement savings plan.

In the 2016 budget, we continue to implement our plan. We've created a climate for business and investment that is one of the most competitive in North America by keeping our taxes competitive, by cutting the marginal effective tax rate on new business investment in half and by eliminating regulatory red tape.

These measures are working. Since 2009, our businesses and entrepreneurs have helped create more than 600,000 net new jobs. The vast majority of these jobs are full-time and in industries that pay above-average wages.

1540

For the last two years, we've attracted more foreign direct investment than any other Canadian province or US state. Those investments have also created jobs for Ontarians, and Ontario is getting ready to create an additional 320,000 more jobs by the end of 2019. That would bring Ontario's total job creation to more than 900,000 in just 10 years.

We know from experience, however, that the global economy can turn very quickly. Right now, the economic uncertainty outside of Ontario is providing favourable conditions for Ontario. A low dollar, low oil prices and steady US demand all favour Ontario exports. But we can't simply stand idle and hope these conditions will continue to favour Ontario. We must make our own future.

The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016, is a part of our plan to do just that—a plan devised after consultations with the people of Ontario, who let us know what was most important to them—their values and their priorities. Over eight weeks, 1,732 ideas were shared; 53,402 votes were cast; 4,340 comments were made. We thank Ontarians for their input.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for their input on this important bill as well.

The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016, is part of our plan to grow the economy and create jobs right across Ontario; to help us invest in infrastructure and in a low-carbon economy, driven by innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses; to invest in people's talent and skills, expanding access to high-quality college and university education; to help more people get and create the jobs of the future; to help more Ontarians achieve a more secure retirement; and, of course, to balance the budget by 2017-18 and again in 2018-19.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to call on my colleague the all-wonderful, extraordinaire parliamentary assistant, Laura Albanese, to speak on some of the specific details that are proposed in this bill.

Over to you, Laura.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? She'll get an opportunity once we get a chance to go around and hear from the other members from different parties. Thank you so much.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Are they sharing?

Hon. Charles Sousa: We're sharing, yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Oh, they're sharing. Okay. Well, guess what? We now have an opportunity to hear from the member from York South-Weston.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by thanking Minister Sousa for his introduction and for allowing me to expand on some of the aspects of Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016.

Broadly speaking, this bill contains a number of new items, as well as a number of amendments to existing legislation that are aimed at supporting our plan to balance the budget in 2017-18. We will do these while we continue to invest in key public services that Ontario families rely on.

For instance, we are taking steps to make post-secondary education more affordable to students. This is why Bill 173 contains measures based on recommendations from a number of stakeholders, including student groups and the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services.

Broadly speaking, this government is proposing a re-designed student financial assistance program that would make it easier for students and their families to understand the program and to access the funds. In short, the new Ontario Student Grant provides tuition upfront in order to reduce the sticker shock that causes students to shy away from even applying to college or post-secondary education. This simplified system would include one single upfront grant for the Ontario Student Assistance Program, the Ontario Student Grant, starting in the 2017-18 school year. The OSG would replace a number of existing grants, including the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant, the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant and the Ontario Access Grant. Bill 173 includes measures to discontinue the tuition and education tax credits. The additional tax revenue from discontinuing the credits would be reinvested to support the new OSG or other post-secondary, education, training and youth job programs.

Our government wants to ensure that when people start a business in Ontario, they know that they will have access to highly skilled and talented workers. This is an advantage in the global knowledge economy.

Our government is also committed to establishing clear and consistent rules to protect Ontario consumers and drivers. With Bill 173, the government proposes amending the Insurance Act to allow for regulations to be made to help ensure that consumers are provided with complete information about the automobile insurance claims repair history of used vehicles. This is a proactive

change to ensure that consumers continue to be properly protected in the future.

There is another area where added protection will be implemented. Bill 173 proposes a number of changes to the Ontario Securities Act. As outlined in the 2016 Ontario budget, the proposed changes to the Securities Act would strengthen enforcement provisions, create additional tools to provide protection for whistle-blowers, update the Securities Act to allow information obtained in investigations to be used in a broader array of proceedings under the Securities Act, and provide that certain rules relating to the publication of derivatives trades would not apply to the crown and certain crown agencies.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the financial services sector is a major, direct source of growth in our province. It is a sector that accounts for almost 10% of Ontario's GDP. It provides about 390,000 jobs, with wages averaging over 25% above the overall Ontario wage average. It is also a key enabler of growth in other sectors and the economy as a whole, supporting investment and savings, access to capital and wealth creation.

The government supports the growth of financial services by investing in skills, education and modern infrastructure, and by establishing a competitive tax system and an efficient provincial regulatory climate. The changes contained in Bill 173 would update securities laws and continue to strengthen the financial services sector, protecting consumers and investors and bolstering the stability and efficiency of financial markets.

Bill 173 also proposes changes to tax credits. Over the last year, the research and development tax credits were reviewed as part of the Program Review, Renewal and Transformation—PRRT—process to ensure they are efficient, effective and sustainable. As part of the PRRT process, the government proposes to reduce the level of support provided through the Ontario Research and Development Tax Credit and the Ontario Innovation Tax Credit.

In Bill 173, the government proposes the following changes, effective for eligible R&D expenditures incurred in the taxation years that end on or after June 1, 2016: decreasing the Ontario Research and Development Tax Credit rate from 4.5% to 3.5%; and decreasing the Ontario Innovation Tax Credit rate from 10% to 8%. The rate reductions would be pro-rated for taxation years straddling June 1, 2016. The proposed R&D tax credit rate reductions are estimated to save the province approximately \$35 million in 2016-17, \$65 million in the following year and \$65 million in 2018-19.

But research and development remains a key priority for the government, which is why the province will reinvest savings from the proposed tax credit changes into new targeted investments across key sectors of Ontario's economy. The government is investing, for example, \$35 million over five years towards establishing the advanced manufacturing consortium, \$20 million over three years to partner with colleges to tackle industry challenges through innovation projects, and \$50

million over five years in world-leading research at the Perimeter Institute. The province will continue to examine ways to encourage R&D investments in Ontario, increase the commercialization of research, and better support export activity, in line with its business growth initiatives.

1550

Bill 173 also contains proposed amendments to the Alcohol and Gaming Regulation and Public Protection Act, 1996. These amendments would increase the tax rate of wines made of a blend of Ontario and imported wine content that are sold at winery retail stores. Implemented over the next four years, the increases to the basic tax for blended wine would help close the gap between the markups applied to products sold at the LCBO and taxes in the winery retail store network. This will increase government revenues to support key priorities such as health care, education and skills training, and infrastructure and transit investments, all of which benefit Ontarians.

It is important to note that the current tax rate on 100% Ontario and VQA wine will be maintained. This is consistent with Ontario's wine and grape strategy.

Bill 173 would also improve the way benefits are distributed to Ontario residents. As part of a broader transformation of services to the public, the government is proposing to improve the way certain benefit programs are delivered, making it easier for lower-income Ontarians to access benefits. The province provides a wide range of direct and in-kind benefits across a spectrum of needs, including health, dental, housing and child care. To improve access, the government is exploring initiatives that include online applications for multiple benefit programs and increased automation of back-office functions.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in 2015 the government initiated a review of the Business Property Tax Capping Program, in response to requests from municipal and business stakeholders to address the potential for inequities and economic distortions. As a result of previous enhancements, the proportion of business properties captured by the program has decreased from about 90% in 2004 to approximately 10% in 2015. Based on this review, the government announced significant enhancements to the Business Property Tax Capping Program in the 2015 Ontario Economic Outlook And Fiscal Review.

The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016, would transform the Business Property Tax Capping Program. Beginning in 2016, municipalities would have increased flexibility to accelerate progress to current value assessment level taxes. In addition, municipalities that meet certain eligibility criteria established by the province would have the option to exit or phase out the program, if doing so would have a limited impact on business properties. As a result of these enhancements, municipalities would be able to adjust the capping program to best suit their local circumstances and improve the equity and transparency of the property tax system.

Bill 173 is also taking action on strengthening the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. The Ministry of

Finance will be consulting on potential further changes to MPAC's governance structure. This will help the corporation to support its objective of remaining accountable to stakeholders, while maintaining excellence in assessment service delivery.

A collaborative approach to consulting with municipalities and stakeholders has been key to implementing improvements to the property assessment system. The ministry intends to continue this collaborative approach and is working with MPAC to engage the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the city of Toronto to better understand issues and opportunities for improvement related to MPAC board governance.

Pension reform is also an important issue for many Ontarians. Pooled registered pension plans, or PRPPs, are a new type of voluntary, tax-assisted individual retirement savings vehicle. PRPPs are administered by licensed third-party administrators, such as regulated financial institutions, with investments pooled to reduce costs and improve returns. The 2016 budget announced that amendments to the act would be introduced to further facilitate harmonization with other jurisdictions and ensure the efficient operation of PRPPs.

A PRPP framework that is harmonized with other jurisdictions would help create economies of scale and minimize costs. It would also foster a greater portability, supporting a modern, mobile workforce. As the government moves forward with the implementation of PRPPs, it will continue to work with other jurisdictions in an effort to promote harmonization.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock please.

I would ask that the members listen to debate. There's just a little bit too much chatter that starts off small but begins to escalate, and I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker. So I would ask that all members agree with me. Thank you so very much.

Back to the speaker.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you very much, Speaker.

As I was saying, some provisions in the current Pension Benefits Act, such as those regarding locked-in accounts, do not align with the PRPP system. Therefore, in Bill 173, the amendments removing provisions regarding transfers from registered pension plans to PRPPs would increase harmonization in the operation of PRPPs with other jurisdictions, which would help limit costs.

Clarifying that the act applies not only to currently employed or self-employed members in Ontario but also to formerly employed individuals who still maintain funds in their PRPP account would facilitate the efficient operation of PRPPs.

The measures that I have described today represent only a part of the proposed budget measures being introduced through this bill. They are nonetheless reflective of our government's prudent and realistic approach to secure our province's long-term economic sustainability. So I urge all those in attendance today to vote in the future for the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow

Act (Budget Measures), 2016. This bill will make Ontario stronger and more competitive, and it will ensure our province's continued success.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 173.

I want to begin by talking from the beginning, when we had pre-budget consultations. This was before Bill 173 was brought to this Legislature. Myself, our PC member Toby Barrett, the NDP and the Liberal Party all took a pre-budget consultation tour throughout Ontario. We began in Hamilton, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Ottawa. Many MPPs—in fact, some of those who are sitting here—joined us across the province at these pre-budget consultations. We held two days in Toronto here.

It was very disturbing to learn that the budget was going to be presented while we were still making pre-budget consultations. Then, of course, as time went on, we actually learned the budget was in translations while we were still meeting with people, never mind the fact that this Legislature spent \$100,000 or whatever the number was to fly all of us, Hansard recorders, translators, Clerks, all of this group all over the province to have pre-budget consultations, only to learn that the translations were being done while we were still meeting with all these people who themselves travelled all over Ontario to be heard. They wanted to be heard. They wanted to talk to the government pre-budget. That means before the budget. To learn that, I think, was insulting not only to all three parties, to the nine members and all of the staff that accompanied us, but also to the people who travelled so far, especially in northern Ontario, to the communities that are so far away. I found that to be insulting, and I find that the entire pre-budget consultation was nothing more than a charade, a sham, and more evidence that, while Premier Wynne talks a big game about openness and transparency, there's nothing like that in reality. That is just absolutely known to be untrue now.

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Speaker, I want to talk about where we were at estimates this morning. We had the Minister of Finance at estimates this morning. We were in a room, and I looked around as I opened the discussion and said, "I remember this room very, very well." I spent almost two years of my life in that room on the gas plant scandal hearings. I bring this up because of the documentation we obtained that has a lot to do with what we are talking about here today.

I stood in that room and said to the minister, "My gosh, this room brings back a lot of memories." Certainly, when the government told us that cancellation of the gas plants was going to be \$40 million and the Auditor General told us \$1.1 billion, we knew then what to expect from this government with respect to any numbers they'd give us, Speaker. They don't know how to give numbers correctly, either by choice or by chance. They choose not

to give us the right numbers. We've seen that; that's evident now.

What we also got at those gas plant scandal hearings was a series of documents that had a lot to do with finance, and that was because they were compelled to turn over tens upon tens of thousands of documents, which they eventually turned over. One of the documents is a confidential Ministry of Finance document from March 2013.

Speaker, it was confidential; it was meant for cabinet only. It was never, ever expected that any human outside of cabinet would see it. This came from ministry staff, so I trust this document, because nobody was ever supposed to see it, so they were telling it like it is. The document says, "For 2014-15 and 2015-16"—they're speaking about the government—"not on track to meet the ... budget deficit targets." That's the truth. They are not on target.

What happens only days later? The Minister of Finance stands in here and presents a budget. In fact, in the 2013 budget, on page 103, he stood here and said, "The government is on track to eliminate the deficit...." Speaker, their own document only days before, which they read, told them that they are not, and yet they stand here and tell us a completely different story. They told us that they were on track.

That opens the door. Now they've got to go back and figure out, "What the heck are we going to do? We just told the public something about which we know the complete opposite is accurate." So they hatched a plan. The nicest way I can say it is that they hatched a plan. The plan was to sell assets and use that money to lower the deficit. That's the plan they hatched.

Let me take a short while and talk to you about how that went together and the moves the government made so that people would never really figure out this plan that they hatched. It was so diverse. There were so many different pieces of the puzzle that would normally be unrelated, but if you put these pieces together, you see the picture very, very clearly. They hatched a plan, and it took a year to implement this plan.

It starts when the Premier stood under a big banner that said, "Beer in grocery stores." I was there. I snapped a photo of it. It's this massive 40-foot-or-so banner. I don't know how high; it must be at least 15 feet or 20 feet high: "Beer in grocery stores." There are other ministers huddled around her—by the way, this beer in grocery stores was going to be the most dramatic thing we have done to alcohol since Prohibition. Actually, it turned out that they're going to sell a six-pack in a corner store. That was the most radical thing they could come up with. "Oh, and by the way, while we're at it, we're going to sell Hydro One."

They kind of slipped in the Hydro One sale back then. It was never in Ed Clark's original report. Ed Clark said, "We're not going to sell Hydro; we're going to enhance it and get better value out of it. We're going to work hard and make improvements." And they said, "No, no, no. Get back to the drawing board, Ed, and rewrite the plan."

He came back five months later and said, "Yes, we're going to sell Hydro."

Speaker, you have to look back before that happened. The government announced a \$130-billion infrastructure program. They announced it in the 2014 budget. In that budget, they said, "We're going to need some asset sales," but they talked very explicitly about what they were. They said that they were going to get \$3.1 billion over four years, and \$1.1 billion alone came from the GM shares that they sold and got back. So that's the bulk of it, the GM shares. Over the next three years, they were going to sell the LCBO headquarters, the OPG headquarters across the street and a couple of other real estate assets they were talking about, which altogether brought in \$2 billion over three years. We understood that. We don't necessarily agree with it, but we understood it: In 2014, they were going to need \$3.1 billion, including the GM shares, to help pay for that infrastructure.

But here we are, a year later now, in 2015: They made a grandiose announcement about the sale of Hydro, and they've said that that money is going to transit and infrastructure and is not for nothing else—but we'll get to that in a minute, Speaker. All of a sudden now, infrastructure is re-announced in the 2015 budget. It's absolutely identical. It's \$130 billion, just the same as 2014, but now they need a \$9-billion fire sale of Hydro One to make that work. Speaker, that doesn't make any sense. If they had already budgeted the \$130 billion with only a small amount of assets, why do they now need the Hydro One sale tied into that? It never made any sense then; it doesn't make any sense now.

It was clear, at that point, that it appeared that they were going to take the money from Hydro One and use it to balance their budget, to artificially balance their budget. In fact, very astutely, right away—right after that happened—the Ottawa Citizen had an article, and I'll read you just the one paragraph of two sentences here:

"A reasonable person might wonder why we need to sell most of a significant public asset ... just to keep doing what we have been doing for years. The real answer, I suspect, is that putting some billions of new money into the province's transit trust will enable the government to quietly shift existing money to help it reduce the deficit or pay for other spending."

Bingo. He hit the nail on the head. This is now more than a year ago that the Ottawa Citizen figured that out.

Now we need to compile the evidence that that is indeed what was happening. What has happened from there is that the government said, "No, no, no. Hang on a second. That's not what we're doing. We're putting the money in a Trillium Trust. That's where the money is going." Well, if you look at the Trillium Trust, Speaker, it says they "may" put a "portion" of the money in the Trillium Trust. We brought amendments last year, if you remember correctly, that said, "No, no, no. Change the word 'may' to 'must' and the word 'portion' to 'all.' You must put all the money." The government voted it down. They would have no part of that, no part of it at all. That's why, to this very day, it still says they may put a portion in the Trillium Trust.

So we brought another amendment that said, "After the sale of every significant asset, the Auditor General will report to this Legislature within 90 days what was sold, how much it was sold for and where the money went." That's pretty basic. That's pretty open and transparent; no trickery there. This is just pretty easy stuff that we asked for in the amendment. It got voted down. That is what's happening. I call it covering their tracks. They wanted to make sure that there's no way to really, truly find out what was happening.

Then what they need to do now is shield everybody from ever having any knowledge of what's going on. So they go in and they shut out the legislative officers. The Auditor General now can't look into Hydro One. The Financial Accountability Officer can't look into Hydro One. Freedom of information, the Ombudsman, the sunshine list—all eight officers of the Legislature wrote a scathing letter to the Premier saying, "How dare you cut us out from the information." So that was part of their plan, I call it, to cover their tracks and to make sure that we don't ever know what was really going on.

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In fact, the Auditor General ended her budget committee hearings by saying that their value-for-money audit of the smart metering initiative and two of their value-for-money audits under way—electricity power system planning and electricity transmission and distribution—"are examples of work that we would not be permitted to do once the proposed amendments take effect." The government said, "Too bad. You are not getting to look at the books ever again." They cut everybody out. The Financial Accountability Officer had a lot to say because he was allowed to have six months' leeway. Boy, did he ever take great advantage of his time.

The next stage that came out was the prospectus. It told a little bit more of the details. That is when we learned that in the prospectus—first of all, as soon as the prospectus was filed, Moody's downgraded Hydro One debt from A1 to A2. That was an immediate response by the bond rating agencies over this particular deal.

One of the things that was in the prospectus was also the fact that they were going to shell out several million dollars to the Hydro One staff as well as the OPG staff. It was \$87 million. They were going to receive shares to the value of \$87 million: \$75 million to the Power Workers' Union and \$12 million to the Society of Energy Professionals. That was part of the deal.

The Financial Accountability Officer then couldn't take any more. The brand new Financial Accountability Officer, on his own initiative, decided to write a report on the sale of Hydro One. It was called An Assessment of the Financial Impact of the Partial Sale of Hydro One. This was his first-ever report. He said, "The initial 15% sale of Hydro One would significantly reduce the province's deficit in 2015-16." He figured it out. It didn't take him very long; it took him probably about two minutes to figure out that these guys were going to be using the Hydro One money to lower the deficit. That was the opening sentence in his summary in the report.

He went on to say, "In years following the sale of 60% of Hydro One, the province's budget balance would be worse than it would have been without the sale." He concludes the report by saying, "The province's net debt would initially be reduced, but will eventually be higher than it would have been without the sale." So he has told the Legislature, "Hey, we're on to you. We figured you out. You're selling Hydro One and you're using that money to lower the deficit." But they won't come clean with it. They still, to this day, continue to say, "No, no. Hang on a second. That money is being used for transit and infrastructure." They're sticking to their story. Well, the story is fine until the plan gets exposed, and the plan gets exposed when the fall economic statement comes out.

First of all, it starts to break apart with public accounts. The budget looks forward and tells you stories that they hope happen. It's aspirational. Public accounts looks backwards and tells you what really happened. So we started to see the story fall apart in public accounts. But it really crumbled when they had to come clean in the fall economic statement.

In the fall economic statement, there's a chart. Page 106, page 107, page 99, page 98: All of these pages allude to the fact that the money has gone right into general revenue. They took over \$1 billion and put it directly into general revenue. They did not put it into transit; they did not put it into infrastructure. They put it into general revenue, plain and simple. It's in the budget. It's in the fall economic statement. It's printed there, flat out.

"How could they do that?" you would wonder. "Hey, I thought they were supposed to put it in transit." They continue to say that.

How they got around that—and that's what I mean; it was a workaround. Again, all of these little pieces that are unconnected and disconnected, eventually, when they're all out there and we expose each one of them one by one, it makes sense.

So one day, out of the clear blue sky, they showed up with this Bill 144, a finance bill. It's like a mini budget. It showed up one day and, 14 days later, they had stopped all debates, had quick committee hearings, had quick clause-by-clause, had a quick vote—boom. Only 14 days: That's about 10 working days, and it was all over. This was a mini budget. It was an omnibus bill, as many of us called it. It went from tobacco to horse racing and everything. But all of that was all gibberish, meant to cover up one sentence. One sentence in that bill unlocked the value of Hydro and allowed them to use it.

Let me tell you, it's a 167-page book. On page 162, there's one sentence in schedule 22, the Trillium Trust Act, about authorized expenditures—what they can spend the Trillium Trust on. It says:

"The Trillium Trust may be paid out of the consolidated revenue fund for the following purposes:

"1. To fund, directly or indirectly, costs relating to the construction or acquisition of infrastructure."

Okay. They said that they're going to use it to pay for infrastructure. All right, so here it is: It says that they

have to take that money out and use it for infrastructure. But Speaker, paragraph 2: One little line says that they can "reimburse the crown for expenditures incurred by the crown, directly or indirectly, for a purpose described in paragraph 1."

They can reimburse themselves for money they've already spent or budgeted for. It has been laid bare by their own hand. They printed it because they had to give themselves the out to be able to get that money, put in the trust and use it to pay for things they've already announced. This money from Hydro One will now definitively be used to pay for the \$130 billion in infrastructure that they already announced.

It's now laid bare. The Financial Accountability Officer has acknowledged that. All of the experts—the Bank of Montreal, all of the capital market groups—are saying loudly and clearly that this is a payment for monies already spent.

Speaker, there's nothing more for me to add, other than exposing that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to lend my voice to this budget process. What I'm going to be focused on a little bit is process. I started off this debate on the 2016 budget by declaring that this process was flawed, and it was flawed on purpose. Therefore, we have a flawed budget.

This morning at estimates, it was really quite a very emotional exchange, because I think the finance minister had expected a lot of praise for this budget. With every layer that we pull back on it, we find flaws contained within it. That's why I go back to the process part.

In the past few weeks, we have had opportunities to discuss this budget, which the government honestly has the hubris to call Jobs for Today and Tomorrow. As I said, we have given some good reasons and corresponding evidence to address why this budget misses the mark on job creation and on social infrastructure.

What is quite amazing to me is that this government has the gall to brag and to boast about the low program spending in the province of Ontario to some audiences and then they move to other audiences and change their tune.

But before I continue, I think it's important to remind this House today about the tradition of how a budget is crafted, because budgets are supposed to be moral documents. They're supposed to speak to the values of the people of the province. They're supposed to be developed with the people of the province in mind. The tradition of this place is that the finance committee travels around the province and listens. It puts the call out to people across this province to listen to them—actively listen to them—and make a promise to them that they are going to take what they hear, take what they learn, and inform the budget bill.

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That did not happen, Mr. Speaker, for the 2016 budget. The first deputations happened in mid-January,

and the last one on February 2. The committee normally writes a report based on these findings in order to reflect what the people of this province want most to see in the government's budget—like child care funding, which is not here; like housing funding and developmental services, which are not here—and that information that we hear informs the budget.

This government was happy—happy, and quite defensive of the process—to completely circumvent the process that they claim to value. It was such a serious departure from the parliamentary tradition of this place. So I share the concern of the PC critic in this regard that this promise of accountability and transparency and open government from this activist centre is a complete farce. It reminds me of that fairy tale, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, because now there's no charade. What we see before us is a government that is happy—that is even content—to circumvent the democratic process on which this Legislature has depended for so many years.

The budget itself was tabled on February 25, which already at the time showed a blatant disregard for the process of pre-budget consultations. Our committee hadn't even tabled the report on these consultations. It's this report that supposedly informs the budget. Just so that people understand, we just got this pre-budget consultation report, like, 10 days ago. It is dated April 2016. It is April 2016 today, and we are debating for a time-allocated debate on budget 2016. The ruse is up, Mr. Speaker.

Since then, we've learned more about how the budget process unfolded, just to add insult to injury. This government had the budget—a completed budget document—sent for translation on January 27. You can't deny that the budget process was flawed. I hope that this government learns from this. But it's important to acknowledge that they didn't just ignore the standard process of the committee; they also felt like they could have a budget written before even hearing from everyone. This is the new selective inclusion in the province of Ontario, and it's no wonder that this Liberal budget is so misguided.

I wanted to share a little bit around the committee process because the finance committee has to go through this budget clause-by-clause, as you know, and we have to go through the entire document. It's important for people to hear how that process went for the opposition parties.

In the 2007 election, the Liberals promised that the government would review all Ontario laws for accessibility barriers. That includes 750 statutes and a number of regulations. Nine years later—nine years later, Mr. Speaker—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know that Mr. Clark is really interested in this—the government has only reviewed 51 of those 750 statutes. New Democrats have heard from Ontarians with disabilities, and they have said that they were not meaningfully consulted in the drafting of this budget bill, which comes as no shock given that the

budget was written before the pre-budget consultations even happened. This is an example of voices being missed.

Whether or not it happens in consultations, it is still important that this government recognizes the lived experiences of Ontarians with disabilities. This should inform what barriers exist and how they can be eliminated. With that in mind, New Democrats proposed 13 amendments to this budget bill, including making the AODA act more accessible. This government decided not to embrace those amendments. In fact, they voted against all 13 of the amendments to make the budget bill more accessible.

One example of that is that—and it was so small. That's what surprised us so much, genuinely so. Sometimes you get in these situations, and there are good people on that side of the House and there are good people on this side of the House, and sometimes you think you can make some progress. We thought we had an opportunity to fight for the rights of those who have disabilities in the province of Ontario. But listen to this: All of the amendments had to do with a minimum—it would require that documents be in a format that can be read by a screen text reader or changed so that it can be read by a screen text reader. This means that anything that comes from this place—any legislation, any directives—be in a format where someone who is visually impaired could actually read it on their computer. It's a small, small thing. Each time, the government side voted this down. I was told time and time again by the members of this government on the committee that this was a good initiative and they agree with the policy, which made me feel so much better. It's a simple change that can make a world of difference to people living with visual impairments. Members of this government said they agree fully with the intent of this policy amendment, but time and time again they voted it down.

Once again, in the standard process of seeing this budget through, it has become obvious that the government doesn't understand what priorities make sense. Certainly, making a budget bill and making legislation and making this place more accessible is in the best interests of Ontarians. Surely we can agree on that.

One of the major things that we did here, across this province, throughout budget consultations had to do with child care. There were so many ways where we could see this government has ignored the needs of Ontarians in this budget. To begin with, the budget promises no new money for affordable child care. It's incredible. In fact, the regulations that are currently on the books actually demand more of the child care sector, that they do more with less, which includes having a 12-month-old baby in with toddlers. They see these little units as being very similar, when they are very different.

This is what we know—because do you know what? It's 2016. Investing in child care is a complete no-brainer. It helps the thousands of Ontario families whose children are on waiting lists to access quality care. There are 16,802 families in Toronto alone on a wait-list, and

this government decided not to invest any new money in this budget. If you want to make a difference in the lives of women, if you want to make a difference from an economic perspective, this is where the evidence says you invest, Mr. Speaker. But beyond that, by investing in child care, this government could be putting money to good use in closing the gender wage gap. I think it's next Tuesday when we hit that point where women have been working for nothing until that point and we actually start making—there's gender pay parity next Tuesday. If you want to make a difference to women in the province of Ontario, you invest in child care.

We've heard lots of rhetoric from this Premier on child care over the years. The reality today is that it's women more often than men who take on the main responsibilities of child care, both at a professional level and in the home. Money spent on early childhood education is just a smart investment. One study in Ontario found that every public dollar spent here on child care generates an economic output of more than \$2.27. That's a better return on investment than selling off Hydro One, Mr. Speaker. There's so much I can say on that.

We simply cannot afford to keep ignoring child care in Ontario, but we see it happening with this budget. Even the *Toronto Star* said that Ontario's budget leaves Ontario's poorest children behind. This is an editorial from February 29. They point out that there's no money for affordable child care. They point out that there was no money for Ontario's 47 children's aid societies. We're still waiting for that database. You remember the one, Mr. Speaker, that's actually going to help us track vulnerable children across the province, the one that this government has kept pushing back year after year after year. This contract that this government keeps giving these companies to not perform the work that they were asked to do—come in over budget, not on time; more importantly, leave vulnerable children in the lurch. It really does shock us year after year that the funding issue around that contract continues to be pushed back.

There was a miserable 1.5% increase in social assistance rates. There's this promise out there that this government is going stop clawing back the \$40—the child support payments that come into those families. It's really incredible, when you think about it, that this government can't collect on the road maintenance fees and fines that they themselves have doled out through the Ministry of Transportation, to the tune of \$49 million—they can't collect those fines, but they can dip their hand into the purse of a young mother on social assistance and claw back \$40 because the spouse finally anted up for some money for that family. I mean, the juxtaposition is incredible around the priorities of this government. When you compare the rhetoric and the reality, the great divide, it's like the twilight zone.

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There was no funding to alleviate the massive backlog in the province's courts. Tomorrow, we're going to have the—who's coming here tomorrow?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: OPSEU jail guards.

Ms. Catherine Fife: OPSEU jail guards are coming here tomorrow morning.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: And corrections officers.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And corrections officers. When you tour a jail in the province of Ontario and you see for yourself the reality that those places are, it really is incredible. When you look at the racialized community contained within those correctional facilities, you can also draw a direct correlation between the fact that those young men and those young women don't have the money for bail, and 60% are on remand. They have not had their day in court. So they may have gone into those correctional facilities and they may be innocent, because they haven't had their day in court. But you know what? They're not going to come out of those facilities innocent, Mr. Speaker; I guarantee you that. In Thunder Bay, we heard from the mayor there. He called that correctional facility a rathole, and he said he was being kind in that description.

At the time, the finance minister had assured Ontarians with this budget that they were not going to leave anybody behind. But this editorial goes on to say, "Kathleen Wynne promised when she became Ontario's 25th Premier in 2013 to make social justice her top priority. Treasury Board President Deb Matthews, who presented the government's latest poverty reduction strategy ... said: 'We are recommitting to reducing poverty among children and youth through targeted investments and supports.' There was scant evidence to back up any of that in last week's budget." That's a direct quote from the editorial in the *Toronto Star*.

The reason that you did not see the priorities around poverty reduction or in a comprehensive child care strategy or in a comprehensive senior health strategy or long-term-care health strategy, the reason you did not see a made-in-Ontario plan to create affordable housing—because we will never address poverty reduction until we have a strong housing process and strategy in the province of Ontario; that just will not happen. The reason you didn't see that in this budget is because the budget was already written. I mean, it really is incredible.

Today, I have to apologize to the parents with children with autism—because after the first reading of this budget, I read, like many people did, that there was \$333 million in this budget for autism. The critic from the PC Party and I went on Steve Paikin's show, *The Agenda*, and he asked, "What is good about this budget?" We both said, "The autism money. It's so needed." I have to apologize to the parents in Ontario for saying that because, at the time, I didn't know that this budget was going to clear out their wait-list by preventing those children who are five and older from accessing IBI treatment, which some have waited for, as we heard this morning, for four years. They were one of the fortunate ones and got an early diagnosis.

To see the painful emotion of the parents in this place this morning, knowing that this government has the opportunity to grandfather those children—there are about 2,000 children who are being completely disadvan-

taged by this policy shift. It's called a redesign. We should know better, shouldn't we? Any redesigning a policy, modernizing it, upgrading it—we should know better now in this House. So it is with great caution that I say to the parents across this province who are lobbying so hard for fairness and equity on the autism file that we are going to have to continue to push this government to at least honour their promise to those families that they have made now, to some of them, for five or six years. It really was heartbreaking this morning.

There is so much work to do on that file. You have your experts, but we have our experts. This morning, a medical doctor said that we are guaranteeing these children will end up in institutions as they grow older.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: A lost generation.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A lost generation, Mr. Speaker. A lost generation.

It has to hit home. These families, these parents are in all of our ridings. You can grandfather those children. You can honour that commitment to those 2,000, because offering them \$8,000 as compensation when a year of IBI actually costs \$50,000 is unconscionable. It is unethical to do that to those families.

Around job creation, very quickly: I'm very shocked to see this government talk about the importance of innovation and R&D. I come from Kitchener–Waterloo. Huge, amazing things are happening there. They were so surprised to see this government cut the R&D spending, the non-refundable tax credit, from 4.5% to 3.5%. The Ontario Innovation Tax Credit, previously a 10% refundable tax credit for small to medium-size businesses, was dropped from 10% to 8%.

When OBIO was here last week, we heard about the negative impacts of this cut. Perhaps the government didn't know. That has happened before. But this will negatively impact their access to matching funds at the federal level. This is not good for Kitchener–Waterloo, Mr. Speaker. It really isn't, and we heard that first-hand last week.

There are some serious issues. The minister this morning was talking about the diversified economy. From what we see and what we just saw in the job numbers that were released last Friday, the diversified economy of Ontario is precarious, part-time, contract work. There's some new language, too, like the "flexible movement" of these jobs—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Contemporary mobile employment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, contemporary mobile jobs, which means you can have three hours here and five hours there, and good luck with that. Good luck raising a family on that; good luck making sure that your children have a better life than you did—

Ms. Cindy Forster: New Liberal buzzwords.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, I know. The definitions around here are quite astounding.

Finally, just on Hydro One: I'm going to be addressing the lack of infrastructure funding, because we've gone through the numbers from 2013, 2014, 2015 and now

2016. The premise that this government has to sell Hydro One to build infrastructure is truly the emperor's new clothes story. To date, the \$4.4 billion that this government has promised to spend on infrastructure—they have not honoured that. They do not have to sell Hydro One; they just have to figure out how to build infrastructure in the province of Ontario and figure out how to honour their promises of building Ontario up—not on the backs of the people of this province as you sell off the public assets, which you have no mandate to do, which you have no right to do and which is not in the best interests of the people of this province.

New Democrats cannot support this budget. It is not in the best interests of Ontarians.

I thank you for your time and for your attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me to bring the perspective of the people I represent in Leeds–Grenville to the budget debate, Bill 173.

First of all, I have a question for the House today: What happens when a government tunes out the voices of those who can't afford to attend the minister's \$6,000-a-plate fundraiser and forges ahead with their own agenda? The answer, quite simply, is that you get a budget like the one that's before us today; a budget that is so disconnected from the day-to-day realities of Ontario families and of seniors on fixed incomes, and that everyone else is facing. In short, it's a budget that makes it harder for all Ontarians.

If you want to know how disconnected Premier Wynne and her government are, consider what they tried to do with seniors' drugs costs. To them, seniors bringing in \$19,300 a year are so well off that they can dig a lot deeper to buy the medicine that they need to keep them healthy. That's how disconnected this government is.

These Liberal members have to be getting the same emails that members on this side of the House are getting from seniors who were extremely concerned with that policy. They have to know that the soaring cost of electricity is already forcing them to be choosing between heating and eating. So they're either ignoring the pleas, or they're just tuning them out completely. How else can you explain the plan in the budget to hike drug costs for 92% of seniors? Well, Speaker, they got caught, and they've shelved that increase until August 1, thanks to the thousands of seniors who took up the opposition call to flood the government with emails, letters, phone calls and petitions.

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The Premier says she will consult before making changes to income thresholds for the drug program's deductible. We've heard that before. We've heard that before from this government, so pardon me if I remain skeptical. I'm going to keep a close eye, and I know members on this side of the House are going to keep a close eye, on this government during that review.

But it's not only seniors that have expressed anger about the priorities of this budget. I've heard from

families in Leeds–Grenville who are literally devastated with the changes to autism treatment. When I heard the announcement first, I had to double-check to make sure. I couldn't believe that they were doing what they were doing. It just was unbelievable to me.

It goes back to what I said during second reading about having to look beyond the headlines with this government. You see, in the days after the budget, there was praise, even from some members on this side of the House, for the investment in autism. But when the details emerged and we learned that they've cancelled IBI therapy funding for children over five and suddenly kicked 2,000 children five years or older off the waiting list—in one fell swoop, Speaker, they were deprived of that therapy that's critical to helping them reach their full potential.

I have some of my constituents' comments that I want to put on the record today. For parents like Chelsea and Mathew Metcalfe in my riding, the decision on autism was devastating. Their eldest son was six when he began IBI, and he completed the program just before his eighth birthday. They told me that the impact IBI had on their son was remarkable. It helped him flourish in school. Now they're terrified about what's going to happen to their five-year-old son, who had waited two years to get IBI treatment and was finally in the program.

Here's what Chelsea and Mathew wrote to me last week: "With the new Ontario Autism Program, he will be kicked out of IBI before he is ready, and will never have the opportunity to access this service again.

"We cannot afford the \$50,000 it costs annually for private IBI services. As I'm sure you can sympathize, an \$8,000 payout is both unacceptable and insulting.

"\$8,000 will only cover two months of private IBI therapy. As we learned through our eldest son's experience with IBI, it can take months for therapists to gain the instructional control required to complete programming.

"If all families can afford is two months of therapy, they will undoubtedly see no improvement in their children—which is heartbreaking." That's their quote, Speaker.

Unfortunately, it doesn't end there. I've heard from several families in Leeds–Grenville with children at Sagonaska Demonstration School in Belleville. I know they're coming here to Queen's Park on Thursday to tell the government exactly what they think about this rigged process—the government calls it a review—about provincial and demonstration schools. Like their actions on autism, what we've seen under the so-called cloak of secrecy, the so-called review of demonstration schools, is unbelievable. They've frozen admissions for the fall and sent teachers back to their home boards.

As Lesley Lehman, a parent in my riding and one of the passionate voices leading the fight to keep these schools open, has stated, "How can you have a school with no students and no teachers?" How can you do that, Speaker?

While the minister doesn't have the courage to admit it, she has set up this rigged process to close down these

schools and shelve their life-changing programs. I wrote to the minister last month to share the stories from families in my riding. On their behalf, I want to ask that the review be put off and a fair process be started in the fall.

I want to share one comment from one of the parents hoping to enrol their student at Sagonaska: "This school will not just educate my child but will change the trajectory of his life. He will be the only one in our family to walk across a stage and receive a high school diploma someday. And when he succeeds, my whole family succeeds."

Again, you've got vulnerable students whose futures are being put in jeopardy because this government has chosen the wrong priorities.

In the time I have left—and I just have a few minutes left—I want to focus on an issue that has developed over the last couple of weeks, and that's the sudden suspension of the Ontario Trillium Foundation capital grants program. No consultation, no warning—just an email at 4:53, the day before Good Friday, two weeks before the deadline for new grant applications under the program.

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport can spin it any way he wants, but that's bad news for volunteer groups, non-profits and charitable organizations. Trillium was their only source of capital funding. These funds allowed them to make critical investments to upkeep their facilities and enhance their work. As I said in my question last week, it literally keeps the roof over their heads.

What was interesting in the budget is it showed that Trillium's funding was holding firm at about \$115 million. But I'll tell you something. It wasn't until we saw the ministry's estimates when we learned the truth: that the budget was actually being reduced by \$25 million. The \$25 million which supported the Ontario Trillium Foundation capital grants program was instead earmarked for a new program to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday.

What was the reason, Speaker? This government is so broke, it can't even fund a program that accounts for 0.02% of its total budget without putting vulnerable volunteer groups at risk. Just like seniors, kids with autism, students at provincial and demonstration schools, they are the victims of this Liberal government's waste, scandal and mismanagement.

Despite the Premier's attempts to convince us otherwise, these are the real faces of this budget, a budget that makes life harder for them, their families and their neighbours. I wanted to make sure, Speaker, that their voices were on the record today.

Those were just four programs. I could have gone on and on all afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity, and I know that my colleagues have other comments this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I, too, was disappointed in the way that the budget was brought forward with complete

lack of respect for people in northern Ontario who travelled long distances to talk to their government and basically wanted to be heard, just to find out that it was all for nothing. The budget was already written.

But we were also interested to see what was going to be in the budget. We know right now that we have this huge feud between the Minister of Health and the Ontario Medical Association.

I want to put this into the record. Dr. O'Connor from my riding sent me an email, and it starts: "I would like to thank you for your support for primary care physicians as an integral part of Ontario's health care provider options."

"I have been in practice for 31 years and have been appalled by the approach of the Wynne Liberal government to the needs of patients by parcelling out primary care in the north to remote health care providers that neither live in or understand the special needs of our communities."

"This short-sighted approach impacts not only physicians but nurse practitioners who have taken extra training to provide comprehensive local care to their patients."

"Please keep up the fight to keep the provision of health care by those who live and work in the north."

This is the really sad part of this, Speaker: "After living and working in the north for all these years, I have decided to retire much earlier than I had planned. This is as a direct result of the Liberal government's negative and demeaning comments about my profession and as such, about my role. I am sure I am not alone."

"Sincerely,

"Dr. D. O'Connor, MD."

She is a very much-loved physician in my area who has decided to retire, not of her own will but because of the way she is being treated by the government. She's not the only one who feels that this budget was a complete missed opportunity to treat people fairly.

I want to quote a little bit from the Minister of Health, to help put things into perspective. On Monday, December 15, 2014, Eric Hoskins, the Minister of Health, wrote the following:

"I have been passionate about ... pharmacare and breaking down barriers to health care since entering medical school 30 years ago. Since becoming Ontario's Minister of Health, I have been determined to put pharmacare back on the national agenda."

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"It's undoubtedly one of the most important steps we can take to rededicate ourselves to the principle of universal access to health care....

"Saskatchewan blazed a path forward for public health insurance in the 1950s, and the rest of our country had no choice but to take notice. This led to the formation of a royal commission, and after years of engaging the public it came back" as medicare, "our most revered national symbol."

Funny that our Minister of Health can say this, but when the budget came out, it went in a completely opposite direction. We had this change to the way that

drug costs were going to be funded to our seniors that meant that anybody who made more than \$19,300 was going to see their drug costs double. How can you reconcile the fact that when they talk about what is the right thing to do, they say, "We have to rededicate ourselves to the principle of universal access," but then when they put out a budget, they go in the absolute opposite direction? We're not talking about universal access; we're talking about how anybody who makes more than \$19,300 will have to help pay for those who—what is that, Speaker? What is that?

I'm happy to report that because of the good work of all of my colleague MPPs from the NDP, we were able to help the voices of seniors be heard. We read petitions. We met with CARP and seniors. In my riding, I had the pleasure to have Dot Klein, Ken Burns, Terry McMahon and Hugh Kruzel from CARP, and John Lindsay from Friendly to Seniors. They all came out and supported, through a press conference, the launch of our petition.

After tens of thousands of seniors wrote petitions, sent letters in, stood with the NDP MPPs and told the government that they had gotten it wrong, we have their promise that they are not going to implement the doubling of prescription drugs for people who make more than \$19,300. So they're not doing to increase the deductible to \$170, like the budget says in black and white, and they're not going to increase the copay to \$7.11, like the budget says.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Do you believe them?

M^{me} France Gélinas: My esteemed colleague asks me, "Do you believe them?" It makes me really nervous, Speaker, because I have this document that the government will vote in favour of that says in black and white that this is what's going happen, and then I have a Minister of Health who, after he took the pressure of tens of thousands of seniors, says, "I'm going to hit the pause button. I'm going to remember my words, 'the principle of universal access,' and press the pause button."

But what if, in the middle of the summer, when the House is not sitting and nobody is looking—probably at about 10 to 5 on a Friday afternoon of a long weekend—he takes his hand off the pause button and this thing goes straight ahead?

How can you vote for a budget that doubles the prices of drugs for our seniors? How can you do this? You have a promise to hit a pause button, but that's just that: It's a promise to hit the pause button. How long is this pause going to be? Long enough for you to vote for the budget and then forget all about it?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Until they hit the fast-forward button.

M^{me} France Gélinas: They'll hit the fast-forward button, my colleague says. That would be terrible.

We also have brought forward to the government the fact that lives in northern Ontario have been put at risk because of the moving of the OPP helicopter. We have more and more municipalities representing people in northern Ontario who told the government that they don't want this resource to be moved to the south. They want

this resource to be available to the people of the north. We have the Manitoulin Municipal Association, the municipality of Mattice-Val Côté, the city of Greater Sudbury, Hornepayne, the township of Billings; we have the township of Fauquier-Strickland—more and more of them, but nothing in the budget.

It's the same thing right now in Foleyet, a beautiful little community in the north of my riding which is about an hour and a half from either side, from Timmins or from Chapleau. They are losing their OPP detachment. There has been an OPP officer in the northern part of my riding for as long as there has been OPP in Ontario, but under this government, this little community is going to find themselves without this resource.

Why is it that the government is not able to maintain services that have been there forever, that have served the public really well? There is a provincial park, Ivanhoe Lake Provincial Park, just beside Foleyet. Hundreds of people come in the summer when the park is open. There are a lot of outfitters, a lot of people milling around, plus the residents of the village of Foleyet, but the government has decided to take away their OPP station. They will now have to phone, and hopefully somebody from Timmins will be able to come.

But this is also the highway that is quite regularly closed. It was closed for a week at a time in 2014 because of a culvert that had collapsed. This is also the highway that is poorly maintained; we've had many, many complaints for better winter maintenance of this highway. So how exactly is an OPP officer from Timmins or from Chapleau going to come? If you've had to wait for an hour and a half, how much of an emergency response is this going to be? And that's assuming that they are right in Timmins at the time, not gone to South Porcupine or even farther away.

This is the kind of support that we wanted to see in the budget, but we got the exact opposite. We got cut back on services to serve the north. We got an increase in the copay for seniors. We've got this huge, complete disregard for the important work that physicians do in Ontario.

The budget was the opportunity for the government to really send a message that things were going to change. Nothing has changed, Speaker. It is getting worse, not better. People are having trouble making ends meet, and this is not going to help one northerner make it easier to make ends meet.

I will save some time on the clock for my fellow NDPers, but there is no way that I could support a budget like this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to clean up things around here and join the debate—to do a little housecleaning, but also maybe to clean it up for the PC Party here on the budget bill debate today.

I might point out that we're working on a constricted timeline here. We have about 10 minutes left because the government, as is their wont, time-allocated this bill. They wanted to make sure that there was limited debate

on third reading, after the committee hearings which the budget normally goes through.

But really, it doesn't much matter whether there are committee hearings or pre-budget hearings, because when it comes to a Liberal budget, the whole thing is a sham anyway. We know what happened in the pre-budget hearings. Traditionally, in this Legislature, the committee goes out and travels across the province of Ontario and receives input from concerned citizens and stakeholders who believe they have something positive to contribute in a way that will help the government draft a budget that speaks to what Ontario's realities and needs are. But in the case of the 2016-17 budget, we all know that the ink was dry and it was already sent for translation into the French language before the committee hearings were even completed.

Ms. Catherine Fife: On January 27.

Mr. John Yakabuski: January 27—I hear that from the critic from the third party, Ms. Fife, and she would know. She's the finance critic. She was at every one of those meetings, I'm sure.

How disappointing it must have been to know that you're going through a process of hearings, knowing that everything you're hearing from those people at those different committee hearings, everything that you're hearing from them—not to overuse the word “hearing”—is unfortunately, sadly a waste of time, because it was not being considered in the drafting of the budget whatsoever.

1700

I'm not going to have enough time to tell the whole story because I've been time-allocated, but I am absolutely convinced that the longer I am here—I'll give them credit. They're crafty. They're sly. In fact, I would suggest that they're diabolical. Can I use that word here? I think I can. They're diabolical in the fact that no one is better at following their mantra, not of “What are we going to do? What can we accomplish that is in the best interest of the people of Ontario?” That never really crosses their mind. What crosses their mind is, “How can we massage this in a way that is in the best electoral interest of the Liberal Party?”

Let's talk about the things that are in the budget now. Let's talk about the things that the budget is dealing with now. The number one thing—and it started with last year's budget—of course is the decision on the share sale of Hydro One, which started later. We're going into the second tranche of sales of Hydro One. The announcement was made last week. The only reason that announcement was made to move into the second 15% sale was to divert attention away from the crisis that the Premier was finding from finding out—not her finding out, but the public finally finding out how the ministers in her government had quotas for fundraising. They were having these special, private dinners at very, very high prices, where ministers would be holding an event that was directly related to the stakeholders of which they had some carriage over. It was very questionable.

But anyway, let's get back—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

It's nice to see people engaging in debate. However, when it gets to the point where I'm having difficulty hearing the speaker and where comments perhaps are not aimed at what the speaker is talking about, I would ask the members to refrain. As a result of that, I would encourage greater co-operation from the government side, since it is, obviously, the opposition who are, in fact, debating at this point in time.

Back to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate that, Speaker.

When I'm debating in this House, I would like to keep it down to a nice, comfortable level of volume. But it seems that whenever I strike a nerve with the folks on the other side—and it always happens when you hit a sore point, because they know that you've caught on to something. So then they try to shout me down, and you know that I hate to have to raise my voice above the crowd. But if I have to, that's my only choice, with the exception, Speaker, if you intervene to help protect me.

On this Hydro One sale: We all know the motive behind it. Our critic pointed that out very clearly today. But the whole point of the Hydro One share sale is to give the false impression, as we move to 2017-18, that they're actually able to manage the fiscal affairs of the province in such a way that they are able to table a balanced budget. If they have all of this revenue from the sale of Hydro One and they push that towards eliminating the deficit—I'm not capable of doing the analysis because we only have so much information, but let's just say, for the sake of argument, that they're able to accomplish that for the 2017-18 budget. Every real financial analyst out there knows that that doesn't address the structural deficit that will continue to exist in this province. Because you've had one-time cash or cash from a specific source—it's like winning a ticket draw for \$25,000. Your household budget is going to look great. But if that \$25,000, that one-time money, wasn't there, and you were already struggling, you'd be struggling.

That's the same issue with the government. They're struggling with the structural deficit in this province that they have created. They're struggling with this structural deficit, so they're hoping that by clouding the waters on the Hydro One sale, people in 2017-18 will actually give them the benefit of the doubt and say, "Oh my goodness. Look at that. They've been able to balance the budget," and then accept the false pretense that these people are actually good fiscal managers. Because they are not. They're the worst fiscal managers in the history of the province of Ontario—worse even than the David Peterson Liberals of 1985 to 1990.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would love to keep it lower, Minister, if you would allow me to do that.

So they're worse fiscal managers even than the David Peterson Liberals from 1985 to 1990, and that is saying something. That's my point about how everything they

do is predicated on, "How do we present the most appealing picture to the voters in 2017-18?" and not about what is good for the people of the province of Ontario and what is good for the province in general as it faces a very difficult and challenging world economy.

Let's speak to a couple of things in the budget. They've got so much confidence. The Minister of Finance, Charles Sousa, presented me with this budget because I was making a little bit of fun in my earlier address at one time, and I said I found the budget not even in the fiction section of the library but in the fantasy section of the library, because that's exactly what it was. When you drill down in this budget, it is just a fantasy. The minister sent me one over, signed to me personally.

But if he was so proud of that budget, why is it that they recognize that, even in a couple of weeks, they've had to back down on their drug charges in the budget? Now, they haven't done anything by regulation and they haven't done anything by amendment to the budget, but now they're saying that the \$170 that was going to be an additional charge for people who make over \$19,300 or, if you're a couple, \$32,300—if you're making \$32,300 as a couple in the province of Ontario, is there anybody out there suggesting that you're wealthy? I think not. But the government was going to be ensuring that those people would be paying \$170 each more for prescription drugs under their new plan.

What happened was that seniors read between the lines. They figured this out, and the opposition parties—ourselves and the third party—were getting deluged with calls from seniors saying, "What's going on here? This is crazy. This is unfair." And we brought that issue to the Legislature. Oh, but this document which they were ready to swear on that it was the best thing since the wheel was invented—they backed off under the pressure. They backed off. So they don't even believe in their own document. Why? Not because they believe that they needed to change it because they believed that was right. No, they're changing it because they know the politics surrounding it were wrong. They made a bad political decision and they're changing it because of that.

It speaks to my point: Nothing they do in this Legislature, whether it's in the budget or any other piece of legislation, is predicated on anything but what they must do to get votes in the next election—or the next by-election, which will be coming within the next few months, because by statute they're going to have to. Everything they do is going to be directed to that goal—winning the people's hearts and minds for an election—and not what is right for the province of Ontario.

That's not how you run a government. You've got to take your responsibilities seriously and not worry so much about the next election. Worry about what is right for the people of Ontario today, tomorrow and into the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I think I'm going to attempt to change the tone a little bit. I appreciate the speech that was given—it was quite good—but I'm going

to come at this from a bit of a different perspective. I've just come off a teleconference with the Attawapiskat First Nation and federal and provincial representatives of various ministries and agencies that are responding to the crisis in that community. I'm raising it in context of this budget because the budget allows us greater latitude, Speaker, as you well know, to be able to raise issues that have to do with money, and this is obviously a money issue.

1710

What was interesting is that the conversation that we were having with the community was actually pretty direct. Chief Bruce Shisheesh asked us to do a couple of things. One of the things that he asked was that there is an issue in his riding that needs to be dealt with, but this is not the first time that it has been raised. We've seen these types of attempts in the past where, unfortunately, people have attempted suicide. There have been responses, but those responses, in some cases, fell on deaf ears. Other times, there was a response, but once the cameras moved away and it had folded off the front page and fell to the floor, the community was left again to deal with it as best they can.

One of the things that the chief is asking for in council, and to those people that were present from the community at this meeting, is that whatever we do now, we need to make sure that the Ministry of Finance provides the funding necessary so that we have the services in our communities—not just Attawapiskat; unfortunately, there are many other communities across the north that have the same issues, in the Far North specifically, when it comes to First Nations—so that we have the services in the community to be able to deal with counselling; to be able to deal with how we're able to give young people something to do as far as proper facilities to spend time in so that they don't lead themselves astray; to doing whatever needs to be done in order to allow kids to have healthy lives—and people of my age, because it's people of different generations who, unfortunately, go down this route—so that they're able to live a meaningful life and feel as if, “You know what? It's worth carrying on.”

So what the chief really asked for—I'm very thankful that the Minister of Health and the Minister of Children and Youth Services, both ministers of this crown, are going to Attawapiskat tomorrow. What they're going to hear is the chief say, “I'm very pleased that you're here. I'm very pleased. We want to work with you. We want to find solutions to this problem that are not only short-term but long-term. But, please, let's make sure that what needs to be done carries on beyond the news cycle of today and tomorrow.” That's the first thing that the chief has said.

The second thing the chief said—and community members, Deputy Grand Chief Friday and others—is that whatever we do, we need to understand that these are First Nations communities. The response in a First Nations community such as Attawapiskat has to be tailored to the reality of those communities. These are Cree

people; they're Mushkegowuk. They're not Gilles Bisson, Franco-Ontarian from Timmins, or Cindy—I don't know what's your—

Ms. Cindy Forster: Scotch-Irish.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —Scotch-Irish from Welland.

We have a different cultural context about how we deal with things, and we live in communities that are far different as a result of our geography and as a result of our culture.

One of the things the community really is asking for is that when the ministry and this government respond to whatever it is that needs to be done, that we remember that we need to do it within the context of how the Mushkegowuk people do things. It may be different than the way we would do it, but that's fine because whatever it is that we do, it has got to be done in some kind of way that in fact reflects who they are and that they can connect to.

The second thing they're saying is they're pleased that the federal and provincial governments are responding to this crisis. They acknowledge there's much being done in the short term to deal with this crisis, and they're thankful for that and say so publicly at these meetings. But, they want to make sure that our response over the longer term looks at how we develop services that reflect the community's needs, but also are sensitive to the community's culture and language.

The other thing that the chief asked for—I thought this was rather interesting; I think this is something that people may not think of. You know, Mushkegowuk people are a proud people. They're like you, Mr. Speaker, in your community. You want your community to be seen in a positive light. You want the community to be seen as a place to live and a place to feel good about. He's a little bit worried about what some people are doing on Facebook and what some people are doing even in the media: pouncing on the negative without talking a little bit about the positives and talking about what can be. So he's asking all of us—and I include myself in that—to be mindful when we communicate around this issue, either by way of social media or by way of media, that we're sensitive. There's a lot of good people in that community, and they don't want to be seen in a bad light.

They acknowledge there's a problem. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, a lot of it stems back to the residential school experience. People who have been hurt and bruised and damaged as a result of those experiences—it has put them in a situation where they're having difficulty in their lives today. They're having children and those children are having to live within the families where people are hurt, and it's affecting their ability to cope. But he asks, can we please make sure that whatever we do when we communicate and do these things, we do so mindful of the community.

The other thing was—and this is something I spoke to at the meeting today, and I spoke to at the summit on health services at James Bay two weeks ago—that yes, the province and the federal government can respond to this crisis by offering some interim measures right now,

but we really need to develop health policy and health services on the James Bay that is driven by First Nations themselves.

A lot of people in this House may not know this, but guess what? Health services and social services are not a federal responsibility on-reserve; they're provincial. We own and operate the hospitals. We fund the hospitals and health services in our communities of the James Bay as we do in other communities across Ontario. Child and youth services are mandated by provincial law. Policing is mandated by provincial law. NAPS is one of ours; it's one of our creations as a province. In fact, I was a member of the government that was there when we created NAPS in the first place.

But one of the things we really need to make sure we do is that as we move forward with the completion of integration of the Weeneebayko hospital now with the federal hospital of yesterday, we don't necessarily just continue with the amalgamation of the federal-provincial hospitals from the perspective of an institution, but we look at developing health services and social services on the James Bay that affect health in a more holistic way that is really driven by the First Nations, that is sensitive to their cultural and linguistic needs, sensitive to the geography of the area and is done so in a way that reflects who they are. So, rather than having a LHIN, as we have now, we actually replace the LHIN with some sort of administrative structure that plans and delivers health services for the James Bay within the context of who they are, driven by themselves.

We cannot continue a colonial approach to trying to fix what was a colonial problem, and that is the creation of reserves. We need to allow First Nations to design a system that works for them, and the Ministry of Finance here in Ontario has to play its part in funding those particular ministries that would allow that to happen.

The message that I bring back from Chief Shisheesh and others is that they appreciate the response that our province and the federal government are doing, and those who are visiting the community and trying to find solutions. They're very thankful that that is happening, but remember that this has to be a long-term engagement and one that is wrapped around who they are and who they want to be as far as the Mushkegowuk people of the James Bay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Wednesday, March 9, 2016, I'm now required to put the question. Mr. Sousa has moved third reading of Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statutes. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I heard a nay.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

I have just received a vote deferral.

"To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly:

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on third reading of Bill 173 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, April 13, 2016."

Third reading vote deferred.

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Before we get into the next orders of the day, I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. McMahon assumes ballot item number 48 and Mrs. Martins assumes ballot item number 52.

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S TRAILS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX SENTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 7, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur les sentiers de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to join the debate today on Bill 100, the trails act. At the outset, I want to say that this bill has created an awful lot of contention throughout rural and northern Ontario. It's one where I believe there has been a lot of misconception, misunderstanding—

Mr. Jim Wilson: It's confusing.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —and as my colleague the honourable member from Simcoe—Grey says, it's confusing.

I want to bring to the House this particular issue and ask the government, as it goes into committee after second reading, to widely consult in our communities about this bill. I do so because I think there are three major stakeholders across this province that haven't had the opportunity to provide their input. They would like to understand a little bit more about the misinformation about this particular initiative. In particular, I look at municipalities in small communities. But even in my city of Ottawa, the second-largest city in all of Ontario, a city that has almost one million people, we have a multi-million-dollar snowmobile industry that assists not only our rural economy in the city of Ottawa, but also the economy as a whole.

I'd also like to point out that it's not only municipalities and snowmobilers—snowmobiling clubs being our

second stakeholder, which are largely volunteer-run by people who want to have a positive impact on recreation and the economy in their communities—but thirdly, I think there are private landowners and people who own properties that are adjacent or near these particular trails.

One of the things I wanted to do today was bring forward an individual's concern, who happens to wear many hats with respect to Bill 100. His name is Councillor George Darouze. He is a city councillor in the city of Ottawa. He represents Osgoode Ward, which is in my constituency of Nepean–Carleton. He's also the former president of the Ottawa snowmobile club, which generates a number of recreational opportunities for our community.

I would like to read into the record his letter to me, which he just sent today, because he and I have heard from our constituents that this is a very confusing bill. I read to you right now from George Darouze:

"Bill 100 is creating more and more issues among my residents. There are a great deal of misconceptions out there, landowners are confused and scared that they will be losing their land"—and that, I say to you, Speaker, is a concern they have. "I really think that more clarity is a necessity, and strong messaging needs to be used to make people understand what's being proposed here. Thus far, efforts have been insufficient.

"I have heard from a few residents who are closing their sections of the trail as a result of the bill. This is having and will continue to have a negative effect on the snowmobile industry, which concerns me deeply. The snowmobile industry brings millions of dollars into the community, organized and run largely by volunteers from the community. Snowmobiling is a core part of our rural life. I would" ask that you "take a strong stand on behalf of our constituents and the snowmobile industry to support our community.

"I believe damage has been done that needs to be repaired."

Speaker, I don't think it is unreasonable for the official opposition or residents across this province to ask this government to consider deeper and more wholesome public consultation with those who are affected by this bill, as Councillor Darouze said, to bring more clarity to this issue in particular.

I know that I am not alone in voicing my concern about Bill 100 on the floor of this assembly. In fact, my colleagues from many different parts of Ontario, hours and hours and hundreds and maybe even thousands of kilometres away from my constituency in the city of Ottawa, from across the province, are also bringing their concerns to the floor of this assembly and suggesting to this government that it might be time to listen to rural Ontario.

Speaker, if I may digress for one moment, because I think this is actually part of a larger issue that we have seen play itself out under this Liberal government over the past 13 years.

I was elected 10 years ago, on March 30—

Applause.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Steve, thank you very much.

I first took my seat on April 13, 2006, a 31-year-old young mother. I took the floor—actually my former colleague was Christine Elliott; we walked in here at the same time.

The reason I tell you that is because the first issue that hit my radar screen as a young MPP from Nepean–Carleton was the Liberal government wanting to do two things: one was shut down farmers' markets and bake sales and all of that—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: —my colleague from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke remembers that—and the second was the rumour going around rural Ontario that they were going to tax well water. Remember that?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Oh yes.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You, too, remember that, my dear friend, Mr. Rinaldi, because you were here at the time.

The problem is that this is what happens to the people of rural Ontario under this Liberal government. They have created a rural-urban divide in this assembly. You only have to look at where the seats on this side of the House come from and where the seats on that side of the House come from. I think it's really important—

Ms. Catherine Fife: What about us?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Well, you're also on our side. I say this to the New Democrats, who also represent rural and northern ridings.

The point of this is simply put. When I look at the catastrophic policies with wind turbine developments, when I look at the issues that we have with wells and with bake sales at churches, and then I look at this trails bill, it speaks to a recurring problem that this government has in actually communicating effectively and consulting with, in a meaningful way, rural Ontario. When they don't do that—because they do not have an effective rural affairs champion on that side of the House—we end up with misinformation, misconceptions and misunderstanding, and people feel that they have been misled. My opinion on this, Speaker, is that they have an opportunity with Bill 100 to go to these communities and let them have their input.

That brings me to something else in the short period of time I have left. I think this assembly has had a great deal of loss with respect to public consultation. When I first arrived here a decade ago, Dalton McGuinty was not afraid of consulting the public. In fact, he took committees, he travelled across Ontario, and he let those committees have their public hearings in communities that were affected by relevant legislation.

That hasn't happened under this current Premier, Premier Wynne. In fact, what has happened, as we often see and what we just did with the budget bill, is that it's time-allocated, it's rammed through this House and there aren't adequate public hearings. As my colleague Vic Fedeli will tell you, even if there are public hearings, they're not listened to.

I think I can say with absolute confidence that if this Liberal government decided, with Bill 100, to travel to

eastern Ontario, to travel to northern Ontario, to travel to central Ontario and to travel to southwestern Ontario, they may actually hear from people in Leamington about how this bill will affect them; they may hear from colleagues in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, in Simcoe–Grey, in Huron–Bruce and in Oxford.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Hear, hear.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Exactly. They may want to hear from them.

Speaker, that is why I spoke today: because I'm appealing to this Liberal government to finally show rural Ontario that it cares and to finally say that they'll speak to the three major stakeholder groups that are nervous about this legislation. That is our municipalities. I say this as a resident of the city of Ottawa; I say this for the snowmobile club that has generated a lot of income for my community; and certainly for the landowners who right now, without sufficient information, have become unduly concerned. I think if the government were reasonable about this, we could come to a better conclusion, but, simply put, at this moment they aren't.

1730

If I may, just in the moment I have left, talk about the tremendous time I had in the last year of going out with the Ottawa–Carleton snowmobile club in Osgoode—it was tremendous to see this volunteer-run organization that respects the landowners in their community and respects the environment and really embraces their sport include myself and several other colleagues to come out. I might point out that it wasn't me, as the VIP politician, who had my car stuck in the snow; that was my federal member. It wasn't me who actually broke my pelvis; that was the mayor. But the reality is—

Mr. Jim Wilson: What kind of a run was that?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It turned out to be quite an interesting day, Speaker. But I can tell you one thing: The Ottawa–Carleton snowmobile club treated us with wonderful hospitality and gave us a great thrill.

I'm pleased to stand up for my city, for the snowmobile club, and for the landowners in Nepean–Carleton. I'd just ask that the government consider actually speaking to them for once instead of drafting legislation and ramming it through this House without any consultation whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's not very often that the reality of people in Ottawa matches perfectly the reality of people in Nickel Belt, but it does. Same as hers, I have an email here from the Walden Sno Runners, district 12. There's also the Sudbury snowmobile club.

This bill has caused some small business owners some really, really harsh penalties. Some of the landowners withdrew their agreement for the snowmobile trails to go through. Entire trails in my riding were closed after this bill came out, which means that every small business along the trails, who depend on snowmobilers so they have some kind of an income, lost. You couldn't get to them even if you wanted to.

The way snowmobile clubs do their trails, they tend to go through marinas once the lake is frozen. A marina is very helpful in the summer for the boats, but in the winter they have gas, they have food, they have a bathroom. It's the perfect spot to stop. And for the marina, it is an opportunity to make an income in the winter. So all of the snowmobile trails throughout all of northeastern Ontario, we all go through. But it only took one. One landowner says no and then you cannot use that trail anymore. You cannot get to that small business to buy gas and food and all the rest of it, and that means a huge loss of income.

Why? Because this bill was rolled out without talking to them. Why didn't you come? Why didn't you explain? Now we have this polarization of this issue where people have made up their mind. Whether it's factual or not, they have made up their mind. They have said, "No, I'm not going to go to a lawyer to figure this out. I'm just going to say no," and the people of northeastern Ontario are paying the price.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I was amused by the member from Nepean–Carleton talking about consultation in rural Ontario. This was from a member who must have voted for the government that forced amalgamations on rural communities over their objection, with no consultation. She probably voted for the government of Mike Harris that downloaded health and social services while the government in Manitoba, when I was mayor of Winnipeg, was uploading those. I remember the pain talking to my friends across the Manitoba–Ontario border as, without consultation, hundreds of millions of dollars of costs were downloaded—or, talking about roads and trails, when they downloaded all highway costs to that, costing, again, hundreds of millions of dollars to municipalities that had to absorb those, without consultation. So I don't think we have lessons to take from the member—and one day a little humility or acknowledgement of all of that forced downloading.

Now, the minister has been out, as have I as the environment minister, listening to that. This idea of the issue of easements, Mr. Speaker—it sometimes helps. I was a mayor in Manitoba. You would be scraping some of the members off the ceiling of this House if we normalized our trail policy with Quebec and Manitoba, because the rights to access waterfronts and rights-of-way that the government and municipalities can use in eminent domain would scare the bejeebies out of the landowners' and property rights groups in Ontario.

This is the softest, lightest law of any Canadian province, and the most forgiving, creating the least amount of legal risk and obligation. If this is too much, if this is scaring off folks—and most of my family lives in Sudbury and they all have ATVs and they have Ski-Dos—if this is a problem, then Ontarians somehow must be weaker-skinned than Manitobans, Albertans or Quebecers, because this is a very easy-to-digest and a very well-consulted piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Certainly, there was a lack of consultation, as was defined by my colleague very clearly. I'm not aware of any farmers that were consulted anywhere. Local snowmobile clubs tell me that most of them were very surprised by this bill. No farmer asked for an easement. No snowmobiler asked for an easement. Yet, the bill provides for easements, and nobody wanted one.

Another question that might arise is, why does this bill even exist? Why is it here? Usually, we debate bills to correct a problem or to solve a problem, but we've had snowmobile trails in Ontario for 50 years without Bill 100. Snowmobilers and landowners made mutual agreements on their own without government assistance or help. It's voluntary, no money changes hands, and it has worked very well. We have 80,000 kilometres of trails in the province of Ontario. Three quarters of those trails are on crown land and one quarter on private land. That has worked extremely well without Bill 100 and without easements. Everybody is getting along just fine. Snowmobilers are responsible and farmers are happy. So why do we need Bill 100?

It seems like we have created a piece of legislation—and since it's voluntary and you don't have to comply with it unless you want to, it would do nothing. We have no problem, so it solves no problem. What we have here is Bill 100 to solve a problem that does nothing to solve a problem that doesn't exist. I think if we vote yes for something that does nothing, the people of Ontario will judge us that way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: I think I've have had an opportunity to speak to this bill in some form over the last couple of weeks.

The member from Nepean–Carleton raised a couple of issues around the activity of snowmobiling. That's not such a great issue any longer in my area of the province. It used to be. It used to be a pretty booming business in Niagara, but because we have such mild winters these days—we can have a snowstorm that goes until 3 o'clock in the morning, and by morning the snow is melted—it isn't such an issue. But people who have those snowmobiles are now using them on our recreational canal lands. They're actually using those snowmobiles and tearing up the land along the recreational canal land.

I think what this bill is going to need at the end of the day, whether it passes—or when it passes. I guess it isn't "whether it passes" in a majority government. Right? When it passes, it's going to need some enforcement, and enforcement, typically, is a problem under this government. We see it under all kinds of legislation where we pass many bills, but then we don't put in the enforcement piece or the actual people to do the enforcement.

Now, the Minister of the Environment spoke about access to waterways in other provinces. I know that the member from Niagara Falls has a private member's bill

that's sitting on a ledger sheet in committee, waiting to be heard, about the right of access for citizens in this province to the Great Lakes beaches and other lakes in the province. I would hope that the government would soon be bringing forward that piece of legislation, so that people in this province actually have access to their beaches and to their lakefront.

1740

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Nepean–Carleton for final comments.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: At risk of repetition, I again will call on the government to do what I think is the right thing in rural Ontario, to ease many concerns from people on both sides of this issue, and that is to consult with them. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to heed the warning signs that we're seeing right now from people on both sides of this issue.

Unfortunately, when I heard from the government, when they just had the Minister of Climate Change stand up, it was as if he's digging in more, and decided to insult the Progressive Conservative Party, decided to continue insulting rural Ontario, decided to not take responsibility for the feelings that are out there. I'm simply providing that response. I believe, by the way, my colleagues in the New Democratic Party also are concerned, in their constituencies.

If the government wanted to show that they're serious about mending this rural-urban divide that we have across this province at this particular time, then they would be a bit more serious and listen to the valid concerns that people have, whether that's a municipality—like I said, the city of Ottawa is almost a million people, the second-largest in Ontario—the snowmobiler clubs that are using these trails for recreation, or the private landowners that are out there and feel that they're affected.

Again, sometimes simply communicating to people in a respectful way, rather than the way the minister responsible for climate change communicated, would go a long way in alleviating a lot of concerns. But unfortunately, the message I take from today is that they're not listening to my constituents. They're not listening to my city councillor. They're not listening to the snowmobile clubs. They're not listening to my local landowners. That's a pity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of my riding of Windsor West to speak to Bill 100, the Supporting Ontario's Trails Act.

I have to say, Speaker, that I was scheduled last week to speak to this for 20 minutes, and I think that my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh used up the time on the clock. He closed out the show. Frankly, I'm glad I didn't have to follow him, because he's very good at waxing poetic. He's very eloquent, and I'm not sure that he's someone I would want to follow in debate.

So I have my 20 minutes' worth of notes here. I'm going to try to trim them down to 10 minutes, so you'll

have to bear with me as I meander through the trail of papers I have here and try to get through all the important points.

In Ontario, when we speak of trails, there are many things we could be referring to: footpaths, multi-use tracks, on-road bicycle routes, walkways, boardwalks, sidewalks, utility corridors, former rail lines, forestry and mining access roads designated as trails, waterways and portage routes. The only reason, frankly, that I'm aware of portage routes is because my family and I go camping every day—or every summer. It would be nice to go camping every day, except for in the winter. I'm not fond of the snow. We go to Algonquin park, where they have many beautiful trails. I encourage anybody who hasn't been there to go there. One of our favourite places to camp is Rock Lake. We go to the unserviced sites. That's about as roughing it as I like to get. We stay in a tent. We do the trails there. We do Booth's Rock and Lookout Point and the Beaver Pond Trail. It's fascinating, if you're not a northerner and you don't experience it and don't live it every day, to see the wildlife, to see the moose, the bear, the beavers and all the wildlife that are around. If you're not careful—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Is that all you know?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: No, there's lots of wildlife there.

But if you're not careful when you're camping and you leave your extra food garbage lying out or you leave your coolers lying out—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Or your small children.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Hopefully, not your small children—unless you've slathered them in peanut butter or something. If you're not careful, you get to see the bears up close and personal.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: They'll scare the bejesus out of you.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Scare the bejesus out of you.

I encourage anybody who does take in the beauty of Algonquin park to be very careful and mindful of the wildlife, and remember that you shouldn't be feeding them. They need to learn how to feed themselves. Often, human food is not suitable for wildlife.

To get back on topic, Speaker, the bill before us today enacts the Ontario Trails Act, 2015, and makes amendments to the Motorized Snow Vehicles Act, the Occupiers' Liability Act, the Off-Road Vehicles Act, the Public Lands Act and the Trespass to Property Act. It's supposed to be consolidating a lot of stuff. It's confusing to many people—just what exactly it encompasses.

The stated purpose of the bill is to provide the trails community with enhanced tools to effectively develop, operate and promote trails; remove barriers to help connect and expand trails across the province; increase trail awareness; and promote local tourism by recognizing trails of distinction. The bill also aims to address long-term procurement of trail lands and tourism promotion.

Legislation would see Ontario Trails Week correspond with its international equivalent. As my colleague from Windsor-Tecumseh pointed out, there is some confusion around that because it says that there is a commitment to

make this around Ontario Trails Week, but then it goes on to say that the minister can change it to whatever he or she sees fit. So there is a little confusion written directly into the bill.

And it requires the trails strategy to be reviewed and maintained.

The legislation also enables the development of a classification system to help users find trails that match their interest and ability. I think that's important, because as someone who is from the sunny deep south of Ontario, as I think I've stated, I'm not too fond of the snow. Although I did grow up in London, and there were times where, for Halloween, we didn't even put costumes on because there was already enough snow on the ground to put on a snowsuit to go trick-or-treating—it doesn't happen frequently, but it has happened—since I moved to Windsor many decades ago, I've become a little spoiled by the weather there and I try to stay away from where there's too much snow. With all due respect to my colleagues from the north, I'd like to know whether I'm heading onto a trail that would be a snowmobile trail or whether I'm heading onto a trail that's going to take me to a nice, warm lodge where I can sit by the fire and wait for the snow to disappear.

In the brief time that I have left, I'd like to talk about some of the trails in Windsor and Essex county. We have many beautiful trails. The one that comes to mind right off the top of my head—and I want to make sure it gets mentioned before my time runs out. We have a naturalized area in Windsor: Ojibway. There is a big-box development in the works as we speak that is currently in very close proximity to this naturalized area. They've already started to clear the land. It used to be the Windsor Raceway and slots. I don't think it's any secret to the people of Ontario what the government has done to the racing industry.

It was really sad to see our track closed. So many horses were put down. Many trainers, veterinarians and others from that particular industry were out of work or had to move on to find work. Now we're finding that this area that's close to Ojibway is potentially going to end up with a Walmart. That is a threat to the wildlife in the area. We have many endangered species in the Ojibway area, and they're at risk from this big-box development and crossing the street—the increased traffic. When the wildlife goes to cross the street from one area to another, they're at a real risk of being killed. Again, these are many endangered species. I did write a letter to the minister in charge, asking that he intervene, and nothing came of that. Unfortunately, they've already started to bulldoze the lands.

There are also the Maidstone Woods. One of the many benefits of living in the so-called banana belt is our pleasant summer days. A great way to spend a nice Sunday afternoon this summer would be to take a trip to Maidstone and visit the Maidstone Woods. The woods include a trail through the forest to Puce River, a great stop if you want to have a picnic lunch.

Also, I just received my invitation today to go to Malden Park for Earth Day events on April 24. This was

an invitation directly from the city of Windsor to attend. It was nice to see that in the invitation they mentioned that they are encouraging people to ride to Malden Park and then, once they are in the park, to bike the trails. They're going to be launching their Gear Up and Go program from Cycle Windsor-Essex. The city of Windsor is encouraging the people who live in Windsor and Essex county to enjoy the trails that we offer.

1750

We have a beautiful waterfront trail that extends a great distance through Windsor. I'd encourage everybody to come down and check that out. We have the Festival Plaza where we have some incredible events that take place in the summertime.

The beauty of Windsor and Essex county is the fact that we have very good weather. While there was a blizzard here in Toronto, it was beautiful at home. It was above zero. So people can use our trails all year round. Although you can't come and snowmobile or you can't really come and cross-country ski through our area, you can come and walk the paths and enjoy what Windsor and Essex has to offer.

In the minute and a half that I have left—that really went fast; I didn't even get through half of my notes, Speaker. I think it's important to point out that, on the government side, they've been saying that on this side of the House—and I'm going to speak specifically about our caucus—we are creating some of the confusion or creating concern over this bill, when, really, all we're doing is saying that they have not consulted properly, they haven't got the information to the people that this would affect. People need to know that if they open up their property for people to use for trails, for whatever it may be—a hiking trail, a snowmobile trail—landowners need to know what their rights and obligations are when they decide to open up their land for use.

The government hasn't done a very good job of letting people know that. That's not the responsibility of the people on this side of the House. It's their bill; it's their legislation, which they're probably going to ram through because they have a majority government. It's their obligation to make sure that people are clear on the legislation they're putting through. Rather than saying that we are creating the confusion, and we're getting people upset, what they need to do is take the opportunity to really get the information out there and truly consult with people. Let them know exactly what this bill means for them, for those that would use the trails, for those that would allow the trails through their property, and I think you would find that a lot of that confusion and a lot of that pushback may go away.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments? I recognize the member from Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think you were sitting in the chair a few days ago when I was actually speaking about Bill 100. I happened to mention that in my community of Kitchener Centre, the Walter Bean trail is quite outstanding—or

perhaps it was a different member who was sitting in that day. But if you are ever in the area, I would encourage you to check out the Walter Bean trail in Kitchener Centre, which is just outstanding.

I'm happy to respond to some of the comments made by the member for Windsor West as we chat about the Supporting Ontario's Trails Act, Bill 100. What I want to share with you are some comments from different stakeholders that we consulted as we were working on this particular bill.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario said to us that "Bill 100 will expand, improve and support Ontario's vast network of trails. The 20,000 kilometres of trails located in Ontario's municipalities support local economic development and tourism in rural, remote and urban communities. AMO's"—that's the Association of Municipalities of Ontario—"input is reflected in the new legislation."

We also got some very good comments from Chris Godwin and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. He said to us that the "Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, its 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs support ... Bill 100." So we have their support too.

Ken Whitbread and the Niagara Escarpment Commission—his comments are that he is supportive of Bill 100, including the six schedules.

And from the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority—they're very supportive of the direction of Bill 100 and are encouraged by the proposed clarifications to the Occupiers' Liability Act, as this continues to be a major concern of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Thank you for those comments, and I'm pleased to speak to this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to stand and make some comments on Bill 100, known as the trails bill here. The government brought the bill in, gosh, over a year ago or so. We went to the presentation and, for sure, we wanted to encourage that more access to trails occurred in the province of Ontario. But then we have a large gap of time, and then Bill 100 comes to the floor for debate.

In the last few months, our critic here from Leeds-Grenville, who has done a great job for tourism and sport—he puts his hand up—has brought forward concerns, and I think we've all had them, especially in rural Ontario where we have a lot of snowmobile trails, about the part of the bill to do with easements, and justifiably so.

There are landowners who have had a good relationship with snowmobile clubs in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I have a little more snowmobiling occur in the Haliburton section of it. But the fact is that the bill needs to clarify this very grey area and that the easements should be voluntary. There was concern about transferability with the easements if the property changes hands.

It just created a very nervous on-the-ground feeling, to the point that some of the snowmobile trails were

blocked during the wintertime. None of us want to see that because, up in Haliburton county especially, it is a large, large part of our tourism industry. Like the old saying, it's white gold. They were very concerned that they would shut snowmobile trails down and affect both the economic benefits we have from snowmobiling and the enjoyment that we have. Certainly, then there is a hesitation for people to come up to our riding.

What we heard is that the government really should have consulted some more. Hopefully, there will be an amendment to relieve some of the concerns that constituents in my riding have about the easement section of the trails bill.

I'll leave you with that. In theory it's great, but it needs a little bit of adjustment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to speak on behalf of the NDP caucus to the comments made by my friend from Windsor West. I know how much her family really enjoys getting to Algonquin Park every summer.

The member did talk about the Ojibway Prairie reserve in Windsor. When you guys come down to AMO in mid-August, I hope you'll have the opportunity to get out and visit some of our trails.

The Ojibway Prairie Complex is a five-park system totalling 332 hectares. Ojibway has 160 species at risk; 20% of Ontario's species at risk and 32% of Canada's species at risk. It represents Canada's and the world's most endangered ecosystem. It has over 4,000 species living on that site: over 700 plant types, of which 100 are rare and 70 are in the prairie nature reserve; 3,000 insects—you won't get bitten, Speaker; 233 bird species, with breeding evidence for 71 species; and 16 mammals in the Ojibway park as well.

The member from Windsor West very correctly said that it's an ecosystem under siege at the moment. There is a big-box proposal. We've been reading petitions in the House, trying to get the government to preserve and protect that land, because it's an amazing part of the planet. Part of it could end up being a Walmart, as the member has said, or some other big box. They have already started cutting down the trees, which is unfortunate. It just breaks your heart, Speaker, when you see such a beautiful nature reserve falling under the loggers' chainsaws. It does damage to your soul as well as to the trees, Speaker.

I want to compliment the member for referencing that. It's in her riding, and she represents it well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I really stand up here as the MPP for Thunder Bay–Superior North, a northern guy who certainly could use a lot more than two minutes to talk about the importance of the trail system and the snowmobile system in the province, particularly in northern Ontario. We have got such a great story to tell in terms of the, I think, 30,000 kilometres of trails, in terms of snowmobile tracks all across the north and how important it is.

In fact, one of our former colleagues, Mike Brown, the MPP for Algoma–Manitoulin, used to do an annual snowmobile tour, which some of the members of the Legislature would know about, where he would take members of the Legislature on hundreds of kilometres of driving along our great snowmobile paths—a tremendous experience for so many of us. It was great.

We've got the Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail along the North Shore of Lake Superior. For those of you who aren't familiar with it, it is a remarkable opportunity, by foot or by bike, to take a wonderful look at where many painters in the Group of Seven actually put these sites on canvas. That is really an important part of our culture and our recreation.

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That's why I think it's important that we actually bring forward this piece of legislation, the Supporting Ontario's Trails Act. The fact is, it will indeed help us better manage trail activity; it will help us protect public land and property by modernizing stewardship compliance and some of the enforcement tools. Those are important aspects as well.

But may I say, in terms of quickly responding to the member for Windsor West, there has been a significant opportunity for consultation. I'm very proud of the fact that a number of northern Ontario municipalities are supportive of this legislation. In fact, I have in front of me the resolution from the municipality of Greenstone that recognizes how important this legislation is and that last fall passed legislation to encourage the government to continue to work with all the municipal organizations—NOMA, ROMA and all those others—to support it. Certainly I support this legislation, and I hope that we're able to get it through the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Windsor West for final comments.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to thank the members from Kitchener Centre, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock—I think I got that one right—and Windsor–Tecumseh, and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines for adding their two minutes' worth to the debate.

I think it's important to note, Speaker, that our trails are a great opportunity to be used as outdoor classrooms. You will find that many schools are now trying to add naturalized areas to green space. I know that in Toronto that's a little more difficult, but down our way and in many other ridings, schools try to work naturalized areas into their green space around the buildings so that the kids get to learn about butterflies and bugs and birds and all kinds of things that, although you can learn about them in the classroom, you really need to experience to really understand and appreciate them. So I think that it's important that we protect our trails, that our trails are promoted and that everybody gets out to use them and see what they have to offer.

I want to speak directly to what the member from Kitchener Centre said. She stood up, like she's supposed to—she's told by their leadership—and gave all these

lovely lines about who they've consulted with and who is on board and that's fantastic. It's done in a way where it's meant to say, "We've listened to a bunch of people. Lots of people are on board. We've talked to lots of people, so therefore your arguments aren't valid."

In fact, their job is also to listen to the people who are saying, "I don't understand this. I have questions." It's their job to listen to us as we come forward with concerns from our constituents. They may have consulted, they may have some people who are on board. What they won't talk about is the people they have spoken to who aren't on board or who didn't understand what the legislation is. I think it's important that instead of reading the party line about what they have done, they listen to the people on this side of the room when we say that some people are confused and don't understand it. It's their job to make sure that it's clear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank all members for engaging in debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Huron-Bruce has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes. I now recognize the member for Huron-Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: To be honest, Speaker, I wish I didn't have to stand today in this House to address this issue, but I, like many other Ontarians, expect the government to seriously consider matters of public concern. Quite frankly, the response that I got to my question last week was completely irresponsible. Far too often—and I have the perfect example to reference—this government simply responds to questions in this House with bluster, insults and essentially Liberal Party spin. Really and truly, this needs to stop. For the sake of our democracy, we cannot allow statements that stray far from the truth to be peddled in this House. Ontario taxpayers deserve to have the facts and that is why I wish to set the record straight today.

Last week, I asked the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change about the Financial Accountability Officer's testimony before committee. Mr. LeClair made a specific recommendation to improve transparency of the government's cap-and-trade scheme. I highlighted this recommendation and asked the minister why he was restricting the Financial Accountability Officer's access to documents related to the Liberals' cap-and-trade

scheme. It was an easy question, Speaker, that required a straight-up answer, yet all I got was an incoherent, rambling response so full of misinformation that I don't think the minister's own colleagues could make sense of it.

What's worse, it contained outright misleading statements. In fact, there are three key examples—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: There are three key statements, which I would like to go through right now, that would lead people to think differently, and we have to correct that immediately.

First of all, the minister said, "I continually talk to the officers of this Legislature. We are performing at a higher standard than any other." However, that answer directly contradicts what the Financial Accountability Officer said in his testimony just the day before. Mr. LeClair testified, "My power to access information is subject to an exception which allows ministries to refuse my office access to cabinet records, including Treasury Board submissions."

Mr. LeClair continued in his testimony, saying, "I am becoming increasingly concerned that ministries are claiming that too wide a range of government information falls under the cabinet records exception."

When the Financial Accountability Officer of this Legislature says he is increasingly concerned with this government's lack of accountability, it is laughable for the environment minister to even suggest that he or any other member of cabinet is performing at a higher standard. The minister should do the right thing by retracting his statement from last week and then explaining to Ontarians how he will address Mr. LeClair's concerns.

Secondly, the minister claimed, "The parliamentary budget officer has not asked me nor ... asked this government for additional powers." Again, this statement is leaving a lot to be desired.

The Financial Accountability Officer specifically presented his concerns in his testimony before the Standing Committee on General Government, which has a majority of government members. He had said the government heard his testimony and is well aware of the concerns.

So again, the majority of the government has membership on the Standing Committee on General Government, and they, with their own ears, heard that what the minister implied was absolutely opposite to what the Financial Accountability Officer was claiming.

The third example of information that strays from the truth is this. The minister said, in response to my question—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me. Again, I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: The third example of how the minister can stray is in his response to my question, and that is: “The parliamentary budget officer has to review all spending plans before they’re done and has very broad powers.”

Again, this statement is nowhere close to being true, in the sense that the Financial Accountability Officer clearly stated in his testimony that he would likely be unable to access government documents that detail projects receiving money from the Liberals’ cap-and-trade slush fund.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change has consulted widely on the Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act. We took what we heard from those consultations and incorporated many of the ideas into our legislation. Before this House, we have a strong piece of legislation that would, if passed, set up a stable cap-and-trade system.

That being said, we have been open to listening to outside input through the committee stage. For example, we have worked closely with the New Democrats on real, tangible amendments that strengthen the legislation. And, as we respect and appreciate the work of the Financial Accountability Officer, we listened carefully to his presentation at committee. The government is looking to address the Financial Accountability Officer’s concerns through the committee process going forward.

I do want to point out that there are already measures in the proposed legislation that address concerns about accountability. For example, the proposed legislation requires the government to annually report on funds tracked in and out of the greenhouse gas emission reduction account as well as provide a description of the initiatives which will be supported.

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The proposed legislation also sets out examples of initiatives that could be funded using proceeds from this account, including projects related to energy use, land use and buildings, infrastructure, transportation, industry, agriculture and forestry, waste management, education and training, and research and innovation.

The legislation would also require the government to prepare a climate change action plan detailing cost estimates for each action that is to be funded from the greenhouse gas reduction account; a timetable for when that action will begin and finish; the potential emission reductions resulting from the action; and the cost per tonne of potential reductions.

In closing, I want to reassure the member opposite that this proposed legislation will indeed ensure that every penny of the proceeds generated from cap-and-trade is accounted for and used to fight climate change. The government will report annually to the public online, starting in 2017, on how all cap-and-trade proceeds are being used to reduce Ontario’s greenhouse gas emissions.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Whitby–Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Associate Minister of Long-Term Care. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has up to five minutes to reply.

I now recognize the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I asked the Premier yesterday a very specific question about funding for post-stroke patients between the ages of 20 and 64 years. The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care failed to answer this specific question, and instead spoke generally about increased funding for some physiotherapy services. In her reply, the associate health minister did not use the word “stroke” even once, even though that formed the exact crux of my question.

I referenced the case of Jim McEwen, a resident of Durham region and a stroke survivor under the age of 65 years. Mr. McEwen is a representative of thousands of people in this province who share a similar funding challenge, and my question was posed for the benefit of this larger group. Simply put, there is no OHIP-funded stroke treatment/physiotherapy services for post-stroke patients between the ages of 20 and 65.

To reiterate, one year ago, my predecessor, Christine Elliott, raised this issue in the House and asked the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to address this funding gap. Minister Hoskins at the time said, “My ministry for some time has been working on the precise issue that she has raised.”

Speaker, one year has passed—one year—since the minister gave his reply in this House. In that one year, thousands of people have continued to suffer with this lack of funding. The physiotherapy services that we’re talking about are fundamental to stroke recovery patients.

On April 2, 2015, Ms. Elliott introduced a motion in the House which stated in part that “the government of Ontario should take immediate steps to find the necessary in-year savings to extend post-stroke recovery services to those aged 20 through 64 years of age....”

The motion was debated, and on the same day—April 2, 2015—it carried.

In a discussion prior to the motion, Ms. Elliott rightly pointed out that research has found that frequent and consistent post-stroke community-based rehabilitation, like speech-language pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, can significantly enhance the health and mobility of patients. But effective treatment is time-sensitive, isn’t it? Patients cannot be told, “Come back in 10 years, when you’re 65.” The time for treatment cannot be delayed, yet it is.

In Mr. McEwen’s case, he was discharged and sent home from 12 days of outpatient care in 2010. When he asked for more publicly funded physiotherapy, he was told simply by his caseworker, “You’re done. That’s all you can get.” Mr. McEwen realized then, like thousands

of other Ontario residents, the true depth of the trouble he was facing.

Yesterday, I asked whether the Premier and her government would start to satisfy the actual commitments that they had made in this very House one year ago. With respect, Speaker, the answer I received bore little relation to the question asked. It was generic, unspecific and completely unhelpful to the people who are demanding our assistance, care and support, and who are watching this afternoon.

The Ontario government has not introduced a bill to amend the Health Insurance Act or associated regulations with respect to this very issue.

There's no question that this is a problem requiring an immediate fix. What I was asking of the Premier yesterday was her assistance—her assistance—to satisfy a commitment made by her minister one year ago. In response to this simple question, I was met with compete obfuscation; in other words, "Let's make the answer disappear in language that speaks only to unrelated general policy and not"—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Yes, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continue.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Speaker, the question asked deserves a direct response. Mr. McEwen deserves a response, and all the stroke survivors in this province who share his circumstance deserve and need a response.

The question is simple: Will this government take appropriate steps to ensure that all post-stroke patients, regardless of age, have access to sufficient rehabilitation services?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care now has up to five minutes to reply.

Minister?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I thank the member from Whitby—Oshawa for his advocacy and his passion on the issue, and I also appreciate the opportunity to give a more fulsome answer, as I believe this question does deserve a fulsome answer.

If this House indulges me, I'd like to begin by talking about the care path for a post-acute-phase stroke-recovery patient in Ontario. Regardless of age—that's really important, I want to emphasize—the post-acute phase of stroke recovery that's offered in Ontario has five settings.

The first one, as you can imagine, is in the hospital: in-patient beds covered by OHIP. In-patient rehabilitation and complex continuing care beds are used to treat patients of all ages who require hospital-based post-acute stroke care. In-patient rehabilitation beds provide supports for patients who require hospital care to reverse functional decline following an injury, illness or medical intervention, including the impact of a stroke.

After the patient is discharged, there's a number of options available to the patient to ensure that rehabilitative services are continued.

The first is hospital outpatient clinics. A number of hospitals offer outpatient clinics and hospital day programs for post-acute stroke patients of all ages. These ambulatory programs generally follow an interdisciplinary, team-based approach. Each clinic program has its own eligibility criteria.

Next, the Rehabilitative Care Alliance, an advisory body established by the 14 LHINs, including representatives from hospitals, the Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres, the Ontario Long Term Care Association and many other key stakeholders, is in the process of developing a plan for an outpatient data collection and reporting system for hospital-based outpatient rehabilitation services, which would include stroke care and speaks to the ongoing work that we are doing in the area of enhancing services for post-stroke patients.

After the hospital outpatient clinics, or if the person isn't well enough to go for ambulatory care, we also provide rehabilitative services in the home, the in-home care. In-home physiotherapy services are provided to patients of all ages, including post-acute stroke patients who are unable to access these services in settings outside their home.

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Some more options include the Convalescent Care Program in long-term-care homes. The Convalescent Care Program, CCP, is a short-stay program in long-term-care homes, again for persons of all ages, including post-acute stroke patients who need time to recover strength, endurance or functioning.

Finally, there's the option of the community physiotherapy clinic program. This last setting provides targeted physiotherapy aimed at addressing acute incidents. That includes post-stroke patients who, regardless of age, can, in community physiotherapy clinics, access rehabilitative care that's OHIP-covered. There are currently 258 community physiotherapy clinics providing services in over 150 communities across Ontario.

I also want to address, in addition to some of these programs, some of the work that the ministry is working on on this very important issue.

There is a pilot taking place that is really important, in which the ministry, together with its partners, is committed to strengthening post-acute care pathways for persons who have suffered a stroke, and it supports a number of initiatives to provide stroke rehabilitation services to Ontarians. This initiative is called the Health System Funding Reform, which is a patient-centred, evidence-informed funding model that reflects local population needs and strengthens the link between high-quality care and fiscal sustainability.

One of the key levers is the implementation of quality-based procedures. Quality-based procedures are health services with clusters of patients, again of all ages, with clinically related diagnoses, treatments and functional needs.

Mr. Speaker, I see I'm running out of time, although I do have a lot more that I'd like to cover. But I hope that this more fulsome answer reassures the member opposite (a) of the care pathways that are already in place, and (b) that the ministry is indeed working on further steps to ensure that post-stroke recovery patients in Ontario get the care they need and deserve.

WIND TURBINES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Prince Edward-Hastings has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister may reply for up to five minutes.

I now recognize the member from Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I rise to give notice of dissatisfaction with the answer provided to my question yesterday by the Minister of the Environment.

In the first place, I probably shouldn't be shocked, because the question didn't pertain to anything that the Minister of the Environment could actually answer. The Premier only called upon him to answer it either because she couldn't answer it herself or she couldn't hand it off to the minister who actually could.

The Minister of the Environment has no ability to extend an energy contract, which was the basis of the question, so he couldn't really speak to that. The Minister of the Environment has no ability to tell the House what the milestone date for the FIT contract given to wpd in the spring of 2010 actually is. If he does, that would have been information relevant to the question yesterday. If he has it, he can gladly share it with the House, and we would appreciate that today.

So I wondered why the minister rose to answer the question. Yes, the Environmental Review Tribunal granted a stay of construction on the project on the south shore of Prince Edward county, but the question wasn't about the stay of construction. Though it's worth noting that an environmental review has focused largely on the habitat of the Blanding's turtle—as this minister knows, a species that this government has invested millions into habitats in Scarborough to protect—the failure to grant an immediate stay of construction caused a disturbance of hibernation and destruction of habitat for those same turtles in Prince Edward county. That alone could prove what the Ministry of Natural Resources' own experts said at an ERT: that this project will cause irreversible harm to this species.

However, that was still not the substance of the question. The stay of construction was granted and the construction has stopped for now. The substance of the question was whether or not the Minister of Energy would extend wpd's deadline another year, or as long as necessary to get that project into the ground. Only he can do that. The IESO can just as easily use the force majeure

clause to get taxpayers out of this environmentally catastrophic contract once the milestone date has passed. All this, the government knows.

What I find remarkable in this case is the degree to which no one in government takes responsibility for anything. The Minister of Energy signs a contract for a process that then goes to the Ministry of Natural Resources, which has to issue a kill, harm and harass permit. The minister doesn't have to sign said permit, but does even though his own in-house expert on turtles tells him this will destroy their habitat. So much for evidence-based decision-making.

The project then goes over to the Ministry of the Environment, which runs the Environmental Review Tribunal. The ERT hears days of evidence and arguments from lawyers both for the big wind developer and the non-profit community group in Prince Edward county trying to protect their own environment. The ERT rules that the project will cause irreversible harm to the environment. It actually ruled that either project planned for the south shore would cause harm, but that's beside the point.

So the developers dig into their pockets and hire lawyers. Does the government join the case of the community group? No, the government joins the multinational wind developer trying to do irreversible damage to the environment. Then the Minister of the Environment has the nerve to get up and sound offended because I dared to suggest that something about this situation doesn't smell right.

In preparation for this debate, I asked members of the community to tell me what they would like me to ask the minister here this evening, and here's what one member wrote back:

"The community of Prince Edward has now experienced over 60 days of hearings for two wind energy projects before the Environmental Review Tribunal (with perhaps more to come) plus appeals at the Divisional Court and Court of Appeal.

"All of these proceedings have reaffirmed what many community members as well as provincial and national environmental groups have known for some time; for many reasons the undeveloped south shore of Prince Edward county is the wrong site for this type and scale of wind energy projects.

"In addition many observers have been shocked during these hearings by the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change legal team defending the proponent's positions—seemingly the MOECC arguing for the destruction of the local environment.

"Two separate environmental review tribunals have now found that adjacent projects will cause serious and irreversible harm to the natural environment. In spite of these findings the current process seems unable to prevent this type of poorly located development from proceeding or resulting in years of litigation....

"Can the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change find a method to interject some responsible management and improve credibility to this process? Can

the minister not find a method to stop proposed projects that have been found to be so poorly sited?"

To quote the seminal political question: Who benefits?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I now turn it over to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. You have up to five minutes to reply.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the member opposite for his question.

Let's just deal with the top issue. The member, during question period, suggested that fundraising activities by the governing party were somehow influencing this process. That was the accusation that was laid. Let's just break this down; this was my first answer on the record. It is pretty much impossible if you actually understand what the roles are. The ERT is independent. I can't involve myself in directing it, setting the time frame for it or influencing it. I cannot, should not, and I hope the member would protect that. Whatever political activities or fundraising activities—to suggest that one minister, either I or the Minister of Energy, should insert ourselves in a way that would distort that process or create favour to anybody then would create legitimacy to that accusation.

Number two, there are director's decisions. In law, I cannot interfere with, nor can I direct, a director's decision. It is illegal and inappropriate. I cannot direct funding. I cannot do any of those things.

I will say that I've had 30 years of public service. I've been CEO of private corporations and that. I have learned that there are 107 members in here. I have never met one yet who wasn't of goodwill, who wasn't honest, who didn't know the right thing to do and try to do the right thing. When people have been caught up in making mistakes, or have been in conflict with the law or the rules of this House, I have yet to see any member in any party ever do that maliciously.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that living through this House in the last two weeks, I've never seen a more denigrating process, which has assassinated more people's character on all sides—

Mr. Todd Smith: You were here for the gas plant scandal. Look what happened there.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I did not interrupt the member once and listened carefully. He asked for some answers.

I think I've explained how the ERT system works. I want the Environmental Review Tribunal to go through this process properly. I know the Minister of Energy also wants that to be a protected independent process.

If there are appeals to me and there are limited grounds, I want to make sure that the House has confidence in my judgement and my ability, that I have not taken sides nor stated or in any way expressed favour to either side in the discussion, and any decision that I may end up having to make, I can make in clear conscience

and have clearly demonstrated to be such. So I'm going to be very careful not to express views on that.

The process, as I said, remains separate from the MOECC process, but he asked the question about the Ministry of Energy, and I'm quite happy because for the Minister of Energy, one of us tries to cover off and we try to get answers. The IESO is strictly responsible for offering, executing and managing the contractual relationships with feed-in tariff or FIT project proponents. The government of Ontario is not the counterparty to FIT contracts and is not in the position to discuss matters related to individual FIT contracts. I have been informed that the Ministry of Energy has entertained requests for extensions to individual project deadlines, and the minister will not consider directing the IESO to grant an extension for an individual FIT contract.

Furthermore, the government has a strict policy of non-interference where individual FIT contracts are concerned. This is critically important in order to maintain the integrity and fairness of the FIT program as a standard-offer program.

I know that the opposition member has raised the issue of milestone dates for this project. It is important to note that milestone dates for FIT contracts are commercially confidential information and we are not at liberty to discuss them in the Legislature. However, there are numerous factors that could impact the milestone dates of an individual FIT contract. These factors are contractually agreed to by the IESO and the counterparty in the original FIT contract.

I hope the member opposite fully understands that there will be no interference from the Ministry of Energy in the management of individual FIT contracts to which the IESO is the counterparty.

I think that clearly explains the IESO process with the FIT contract and explains the ERT process. The Minister of Energy's job is to protect the integrity and not politicize that process.

Mr. Speaker, I really mean this very sincerely: We are honourable members here. On city councils, you are not allowed to attribute motive. If you attribute motive to an honourable member—I know my friend from Whitby—Oshawa would know this—you are removed by the Speaker in most councils. We have seen nothing but attribution of motive, and I have 30 years of integrity. I have never been involved in a scandal—I am not a wealthy person—nor has the member opposite.

I want to conclude simply by saying that we will protect the integrity of the process, and I hope the member opposite will as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1833.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
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Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
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Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté
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Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Vacant	Scarborough–Rouge River	

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Soo Wong
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Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
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Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Bill Walker
Jeff Yurek
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la politique sociale**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
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Wednesday 13 April 2016

Mercredi 13 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 13 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 13 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S TRAILS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX SENTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 12, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur les sentiers de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 100, Supporting Ontario's Trails Act, today. Before I start off, I want to say this: Never has there been so much controversy by so few people and never has so much misinformation been used with so few facts to create a—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Actually, you're using unparliamentary language. I'd ask the member to withdraw and then make sure that he talks about the bill.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw. I'm not quite sure what was unparliamentary, but I withdraw anyway.

It has created a mountain out of a molehill with Bill 100. I support Bill 100, but I do understand why people are suspicious, and they have cause and they are justified to be suspicious. For the last 13 years, rural Ontario has been hurt and injured with legislation that has steadily eroded property rights, steadily devalued our properties, diminished our prosperity, and it has all been done through legislation. Typically, the legislation sounds good, things like the provincial policy statement, the greenbelt, the Clean Water Act, a number of things. So I do understand why there is fear about Bill 100.

But after over a decade of intrusive legislation, the Liberal government has actually introduced a bill that is beneficial and helps rural Ontario. It promotes and improves property rights in Ontario. This is the first bill I have seen from this Liberal government that actually helps and promotes property rights. I'd like to take a few moments to tell people why. I do understand that it is as

if the world had been turned upside down by this Liberal government and Bill 100. People don't know what to make of it.

The facts for private property owners are simple. Presently, property owners are prevented in law from suing for more than \$1,000 if there are damages to their property caused by trespassers. Under Bill 100, that unfair limitation of \$1,000 is removed. If Bill 100 passes, there will be no arbitrary limit on how much people can seek for damages; definitely an improvement, and it adds to the protection of property rights. Presently, the fines for trespassers on private property are set at a maximum of \$2,000. Under Bill 100, that maximum is raised to \$10,000; certainly another benefit and another added protection for private property owners.

At the moment, when there are trail agreements, the covenants on those agreements are not legally enforceable. Bill 100 permits covenants, such as time of use, duration of the covenant, who can access the trails and what types of vehicles. A whole host of covenants can be placed, but they also now become legally enforceable by the property owner; another benefit and another protection for property rights.

One thing that many people have found to be the scariest of all with Bill 100 is voluntary easements. They can only be created by mutual consent of the property owner. There is no imposition, there is nothing arbitrary, there is no coercion and there is no liability with those easements. But it does allow choice; indeed, a very scary thing to allow choice with legislation in Ontario.

But I think something else has been missing in this discussion, and that is the benefits and the case for rural Ontario. Trail associations and businesses that benefit from trail use are extensive and expansive. Expanding the use of trails helps our rural and small-town restaurants, motor sport dealers, motels, bed and breakfasts, and stores. Every business in rural and small-town Ontario benefits from trails as people come to rural Ontario for recreation and tourism.

The corollary of that, of course, must also be true: Reducing access to trails reduces business opportunities, reduces revenues and reduces prosperity for rural Ontario.

Certainty and security of tenure and use for both the property owner and the trails association is needed to permit and encourage greater investment and expansion in trail infrastructure, such as highway overpasses, river and stream crossings, and bridges. Certainty and security of tenure and use must be there to encourage expansion.

Rural Ontario would largely be empty and unpopulated without transferable easements registered upon title, as we have throughout Ontario today. Deeded access, rights of way and utility easements: All are registered on title, and all are transferable—nothing scary. Indeed, without easements, we would all be living in the dark without electricity and without phones, and very few would have access to their cottages without transferable easements registered on title. I would suggest that there are very few people here today, very few people in Ontario and very few people watching this who don't already have some form of transferable easements registered on their properties.

0910

In closing, Speaker, it would really be a dystopian world where voluntary and mutually beneficial easements are viewed as dangerous, as suspicious, as harmful for property owners, and where improving rural business opportunities is seen as a negative.

I do hope the government has learned some powerful lessons with Bill 100—powerful lessons: that it is not bad—that it is indeed good—to protect property rights, to strengthen property rights. This is a good thing.

I have to commend the Minister of Tourism for being the first minister in my time who gets it, who understands that if we promote and protect property rights, we will all be better off.

But I will also say this: I hope the rest of the ministers in cabinet understand what this minister has done, and I hope the Liberal Party understands what has happened. This great outcry over Bill 100 is because of the lengthy assault on rural Ontario in the past, the continuous, never-ending and relentless erosion of property rights, and the suspicion and fear that this Liberal government has fostered and cultivated over the last 13 years. I hope this Liberal government is now on a new trail.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's quite an amazing thing to come in here in the morning and experience something that all of us will be telling our grandchildren about in the decades to come: that the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington actually stood in this House and said that something in a government bill was worth supporting and was useful, contrary to rumour. For those of you who may not be familiar with this place, this is an extraordinary moment—an extraordinary moment.

I want to say that I had an opportunity to look over the comments from our critic the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, who in fact said "Yes, this bill does some very useful things for trails, for people in Ontario who like to wander through the countryside and for property owners."

The decisions about the trails are in the hands of the landowners. As far as I can tell, and I stand to be corrected, there's no expropriation here, there's no action to alienate people from their land. There's an opportunity for landowners to be protected in a way they may not have been protected in the past. There's an opportunity

for access to trails in a way that's more predictable than has been in the past.

Frankly, Speaker, for those of us who enjoy the extraordinary landscape that we have here in Ontario, to be able to go out and actually roam around that landscape, and for those who own the land that we happily tread upon to have protection as well—those are all good things. In an epoch-making way, that has been established by the comments of this member.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments? The member for Kingston and the Islands.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As usual, it's a pleasure to see you in the chair.

I would like today to introduce Patrick Connor from the Ontario Trails Council. Thank you very much for being here.

I would like to just quickly pick up on some of the comments that have already been said. The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, thank you very much for your comments, and thank you to the member from Toronto-Danforth for acknowledging the extraordinary and perhaps, indeed, historic moment about something positive that we've done.

But I do also want to pick up on some of the other comments that the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington has come forward with. I'm getting a little bit of fearmongering in some of the statements that have been made. Despite the fact that he has said that everyone benefits from trails, he also mentions, on the other hand, that this legislation is going to turn the world upside down and that it's harmful for landowners.

This piece of legislation has been worked on by many organizations for many years, and I'm sure that the guest in the gallery would attest to that. We also have numerous other positive comments of support from organizations like the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. They represent an enormous number of people across the province. They're very supportive of the trails act. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Niagara Escarpment Commission—all supportive of the act.

So I think we should stop the fearmongering and look at what's positive. They are willing landlords.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments? The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of my property owners. I have to commend the member from Lanark, because he brings up a good point: We're already seeing trails in our area that have been lost this year. It's unfortunate, because I think the bill was there to add some clarity and to put some tools in place that should enhance this. But with the lack of consultation with the different people involved, it seems to have had the opposite effect. I think it's a lesson, and I think the government needs to get out there and do a little bit of healing of some of these groups and landowners that are going to take away a very important resource of ours.

I think it's important, especially in the wintertime, to get out and have something to do and be out in the out-

doors. We're seeing, in area after area—and unfortunately, with a trail that goes across multiple properties, if you lose one, you lose the trail. I know that it supposedly might have been a bill, hopefully, with a good goal in sight, but we see it's not there—and the unintended consequences.

We encourage the government to do a little more consultation and get out there. It's a little after the fact—we would have liked to have seen this done earlier—but the end result is what's important here. I don't think we want to lose these important trails. It's good for tourism, and it's good just for the community. As the mayor of South Glengarry—we purchased a railway track that could be used for trails.

But it really takes the multiple trails being put in place. The volunteers that work at getting these trails—it's a lot of work. They're seeing the loss now, so it's got to be hard on them. I think we have to go out and give them a little bit of moral support and help them out on this one. Hopefully, we can do something that gets back and actually enhances the trails, not takes away from them.

We're looking forward to seeing some of that consultation and some work with the government with these owners.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I enjoy how he looks at each section of the bill and analyzes them and gives, really, a wonderful explanation on the pros and the cons.

This time he was pro-bill, but the member from Kingston—I don't think she realized he was actually complimenting the government on a very unique circumstance. We don't often do that here. We are the critics; we're the opposition, and we're supposed to point out the problems with bills. That's our duty. We want to make sure that they get the bills right, because there have been a lot of bills that have come through this House that aren't quite right.

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, exactly.

They sound good, and there are some pieces that are in there, but then there's always that hidden poison pill. It's hard to vote against, because it's doing some good over here, and then it isn't helping in other areas. So it's always a tough decision.

That's what our role is: to let them know about those poison pills and to try to make sure they acknowledge those. Hopefully, when the bill goes to committee, they listen to the people that this bill is affecting.

0920

She did talk about support for this bill. There have been several municipalities who have passed resolutions on this bill. But there is something that I think—I looked in the bill and maybe the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington can comment on it. The minister has authority to designate special designation to

trails. I've heard through some discussions that land-owners who have these trails on their property are not sure what that means and what that's going to look like for them. If the minister has power of designation, how does that translate into seasonal use or promotion under tourism and things like that? So that's a question; if anyone has an answer, I'd love some clarity on it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I don't know if I can answer all the questions from the member from London–Fanshawe in two minutes, as well as thank people—the members from Toronto–Danforth, SDG and London–Fanshawe—for coming to the House this morning and listening. I talked in my comments about this Liberal government learning some lessons from Bill 100. The member from Kingston and the Islands ought to have listened and heard about lessons, because she obviously didn't listen to my comments whatsoever and brought her talking points from the corner office instead of her listening hat this morning. Enough of that. I do hope the member from Kingston and the Islands may correct her record afterwards, after listening.

However, for the member from London–Fanshawe: The minister does have powers to create a special designation, but there are no underlying authorities to impinge or infringe on use or title or enjoyment of one's private property. The minister can make a pronouncement that this is a really, really special trail, and maybe put a plaque up. They would even have to ask the property owner to put a plaque up for a really special, special trail. But there are no underlying authorities in the bill for the minister to, like I say, infringe or impinge on private property.

I do hope the Liberal government is listening and that they stay on this new path, this new trail of bringing legislation that benefits rural Ontario, and that they bring their listening cap when they come to the Legislature for debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure to rise this morning. I want to thank my colleague the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington—LFLA, as we like to refer to it—because he's certainly done his homework on this. Although we typically expect a really critical eye and critical comments coming specifically from him, this morning we're hearing some positive comments that I think should all call us to support and promote the bill—with, obviously, cautious reservation, as we tend to do as opposition members, as we are charged to do.

So, the bill itself: Speaker, our trail network in Ontario really is an important cultural, social and economic component of the province; something that anyone in this House who has had the opportunity to partake in and enjoy would understand not only is it a way to be further connected with the beauty of this province—the supernatural beauty, certainly, in all quadrants of the province—but also a way to connect to people. Along these

trails, you'll find little hamlets that people rely on for their economic welfare and for their livelihoods. I can't name them off the top of my head, but I know they exist, and I know they're really important components to rural Ontario and remote Ontario. Sometimes they're even lifelines, when all else fails. It's important that we pay some attention to them and promote them, and ensure that they are safeguarded and continue to play the vital role.

As opposition members and as members in the House, we have reviewed the bill. A couple of things stand out that I think could be easily remedied. One is simply in the naming of the bill and the intent of the bill. Very clearly, the bill has six schedules, one enactment, and amendments to five acts.

It proclaims Ontario Trails Week. That corresponds with the international equivalent, which is the first Saturday of June of every year.

It requires the minister to maintain an Ontario trails strategy; that's a good thing. It creates a regime for the creation of easements for the use of privately held land to be used as part of the Ontario trail network, and for the users of trails—for instance, snowmobile associations—to use a portion of the landowners' property.

Now, that's not in the description of the bill. If I might steal this from my colleague who, very helpfully—thank you. The purpose of the bill: What I'd like to do, for the benefit of the members, is to match this schedule that creates a regime for creating easements, which is really the most mechanical portion of the bill, to the purpose.

The purposes of the bill are:

"1. To increase awareness about and encourage the use of trails.

"2. To enhance trails and the trail experience.

"3. To protect trails for today's generation and future generations.

"4. To recognize the contribution that trails make to quality of life...."

Nothing in the introduction of the bill states the creation of this easement portion. That should be clearly articulated. That, I guess, is what we're talking about today. The bill should have had broader consultation. In the description of the bill, that should have been clearly articulated. That's where I think there has been a lot of confusion.

We've heard clarity from the member from LFLA, but even some of those in his own caucus have been confused about it. I hope that those members themselves will, at some point, take the lead from the member and dispel some of those myths, because it's really important that people understand what this bill does.

Speaker, we have in Ontario somewhere around 30,000 kilometres of trails in the trail network. That's enormous; that is a huge network of trails that connect communities.

One thing that I think we should be cognizant of is the competing jurisdictions that also have wonderful trail networks. My riding is in southwestern Ontario. In Windsor and Essex county, we're able to easily connect with trail networks in Michigan. Just a little cursory research

that I did, just prior to getting up here: If you buy a Michigan trail pass, it costs you somewhere around \$45 a year to access their network of trails. I'm not exactly sure how many kilometres it would be, or miles, but it certainly could be comparable, given the size of the state of Michigan.

In Ontario, an annual fee for a trail pass ranges somewhere from \$180 to \$260 a year. That's a little bit cost-prohibitive, especially when you're trying to entice folks to come here. Visitors from all jurisdictions, when they look at the cost of the trail pass—it's prohibitive to access it. We should look at somehow making it, potentially, a little bit more affordable for those to come in. We could probably increase the numbers of people who take advantage of these trails, and, again, get a lot more recognition and promotion of the trails.

I've even heard some criticism from folks from Ontario who say, "Listen, they just keep jacking up the price on the trail passes, and we can't afford to go," given the cost of gas and the cost of buying machines—snowmobiles, ATVs and UTVs—these days. You're looking at tens of thousands of dollars if you're going to get a decent machine—something that, at some point in my life, Speaker, I'd love to be able to take advantage of, although I don't have the time to enjoy it.

0930

I know there are those in Ontario who really make it a family event, something that they all partake in and something that they invest in. Again, if we look at the contribution to the economy that our ATV, snowmobile and UTV associations and users make every year, it's quite large. It's something that deserves our attention, something that deserves our promotion.

I'm happy to see that this bill adds some clarity to the use of the trails for landowners and those who use them. Again, the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington did a really good job in dispelling some of those myths.

One of the things that we would like to see—and I think members get the sense that this will receive all-party support; at least, it certainly will from our party—although the bill creates legal clarity in the relationship between landowners and trail users, there's poor communication and confusion that has prevailed around the relationship between owners and trail users.

We've seen this time and time again. I was walking out of here the other day, contemplating the job that we do and wondering when we can ever get to a point where the government can get a bill right the first time. It's so rare in this place that we see that they get it right. We've seen bills come back just months after they were introduced and passed by the majority government, where they've missed a couple of words and it's totally transformed the intent and the mechanisms of the bill. This is getting pretty close, although we think with a little bit more consultation, they could have actually gotten it right, right off the bat—something that doesn't waste any of our time, something that doesn't waste the time of proponents or opponents of the bill because there's been

broad consultation, and all of that has been worked out prior to it hitting the floor here in the Legislature.

We don't think that that is quite where this bill is. We know that it's going to need some minor tweaking, but after that, we've proposed—and our critic for agriculture from Timiskaming–Cochrane has asked—that the government be strategic about where they potentially travel the bill to talk to those stakeholders. We know that there has been a long history of rural Ontario being shut out of consultation when it comes to provincial decisions and land utilization. This is a way that they can make amends and show that there is some good faith and some partnership with rural Ontario.

That's something, again, that my colleague from LFLA was very clear about. He hopes that this ushers in a new era of consultation between the province and rural Ontario, something that's desperately needed because it avoids the confusion and the backlash that has the potential of derailing important bills like this.

I'm happy to stand in support of the bill today. I'd like to see it go through with some minor clarifications, a little bit of tweaking; but ultimately, we're quite happy that this is seeing its way through.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm glad to respond to the member from Essex. I think he raised some valid points.

I just want to say that the legislation before us really is critically important in establishing protection for our trail system going forward for the next 20 or 30 years. We sometimes forget; we invest billions of dollars in road infrastructure and public transit infrastructure, but we don't appreciate the need to make investments in our trail infrastructure.

You think, in going forward, when our young pages reach your age, Madam Speaker, what will they have to treasure? The most vulnerable part of that legacy is probably our natural environment, our ecosystem; and our trails are an integral spine through our ecosystem that we have to protect.

That is what this bill does. It tries to ensure that these trails—80,000 kilometres of trails—are there for our pages' children and their children, because it is an investment in the future health and the economy of this province.

We sometimes think that the trail investment is like a weekend-type investment. We need to build on this bill to continue to have everybody in Ontario appreciate our trails. I would ask all the pages, all the members—and some of them already do—to walk your local trail. Volunteer at your local trail. You all have one. It's good for your health, it's good for the local economy and it's good for your future. Adopt the local trail. Go and volunteer this weekend. I challenge the pages: Find out where your local trail is.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, thank you very much, Speaker. That's the first time in this chamber that you in

that chair have called on the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke to speak, and I'm really honoured to be here when you—how could I not be here, right?

I'm going to get to speak to this bill, hopefully in the near future. I always thank the members for their contributions to this debate, but I particularly also want to recognize my friend from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington for trying to clarify something that is very important in this bill. This is where the government, I believe—and I'll articulate this in a more wholesome way when I get to speak myself. I think the government, because it didn't consult prior to the adoption and the tabling of this bill has, by its own neglect, created much of the firestorm surrounding this bill with respect to private landowners, particularly, obviously, in rural Ontario as it affects me, and more specifically for those rural landowners who have a snowmobile trail traversing their property. It has certainly caused a great deal of consternation in my county of Renfrew and in the portion of the district of Nipissing that I represent as well.

I'll have that opportunity when I'm speaking. I have also written a column of my own for the local press so that the members of my constituency have a little background on how we feel about this, but I will have a chance to more completely articulate that at a later time.

With the few seconds I have left, I just want to make sure that—and to what my colleague said—these people across the hall have to remember that you measure twice, cut once, get the bill right and make sure the necessary components are there to alleviate some of these problems in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to have a few moments to be able to comment on behalf of Hamilton Mountain and to my seatmate, the member from Essex.

Within our province, we're so greatly blessed. It has been said that we have over 80,000 kilometres of trails throughout the province. That's different types of trails. I know that the member from Essex was talking about 30,000 kilometres of trails, and that's motorized trails that could take snowmobiles and different motorized vehicles.

Our member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has pointed out very clearly the concerns with landowners and the easements that are not, to my understanding, part of this bill but have become part of a problem with the government not really doing the full consultation and not spelling things out correctly in the bill.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane said very clearly that the property owners have nothing to gain and everything to lose when it comes to the easements. It's something that I think we need to make sure we get right and make sure that we have these conversations while we have this debate period. Hopefully, the government will allow some of the amendments that will be brought forward, I'm sure, from New Democrats as well as the Conservatives, to make sure that we get it right and that we reward our trails and that we reward the landowners who

so generously give up their land and protect that so that people across this province can enjoy it.

Thank you very much for the time. It's always a pleasure to follow up and to comment for my seatmate, the member from Essex.

0940

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I may have related this story before: I grew up in central Etobicoke, in my riding of Etobicoke Centre, and lived in a number of places as a kid, but at one point I lived close to the Humber River and a beautiful green space in our community called James Gardens. Our family used the trails along the Humber River quite often and quite extensively. In fact, I have a picture that hangs in my mum's home of me as a kid—I've got to be about 10 or 11 years old, posing with my sister in this photo—and we're along the Humber River with the trails in the background. As a family, we used to make use of those trails quite often. I don't make as good use of them as I probably should any longer so this is a good reminder for me to do more of that.

All this is to say, I really value our trails across the province, but, speaking as someone who represents a suburban community, the trails play an important role not just outside of our city but within our municipalities. Our family is a prime example of a family that valued that.

Of course, I think this bill not only allows us to promote trails, and in so doing, engage and involve more people—people like me who should be making more use of those trails—not just because it's a wonderful natural resource and it's a wonderful resource for families, as I described, but also because it supports health and wellness in our communities.

When I think about aspects of this particular bill that I think are positive, I think the classification system is an excellent way of making people aware of which trails are fit for them and which are not; it makes it more inviting—recognizing trails of distinction. I think protecting private property rights is also very, very important, so I appreciate that those measures are in the bill.

There's a lot of comment from the opposite side about lack of consultation. There was consultation on this bill. I don't have time to get into that; I'm sure there will be another opportunity.

All that said, I think this is a wonderful bill and I'm glad to have a chance to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My colleague corrected me; I did state that there are 30,000 kilometres of trails. There are 80,000 total kilometres of trails; 30,000, I believe, that are accessible by motorized vehicles: ATVs, snowmobiles, UTVs.

In Windsor and Essex county, we don't have access to those types of trails. We just rip up and down the lake when it freezes over. It would be nice, actually; I'm sure folks would take advantage of it if there were, but I guess just our topography and geography aren't conducive to a

network of trails. That's why so many people from southwestern Ontario head up north to chase the snow in the winter, to be able to make use of them. Again, they're a really important economic driver for northern Ontario.

Thanks to all members who spoke to the bill. I do want to pitch a question out there. I don't know if members of the government are going to pass up the next rotation or not, but maybe members of the opposition can clarify: One of the questions that we have is that—easements can “be assigned by an eligible body to another eligible body.” Again, our critic the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane has asked that this clause be clarified for the benefit of property owners and stakeholders. Who is an “eligible body?” Who is “another eligible body?” That should be clearly identified. It should be, I guess, broad enough to make sure that it's not prohibitive to folks who currently use and plan to use the network of trails and make sure that the process is technically clear and easy to take advantage of.

That being said, again, I'm happy to stand in support of Ontario trails, the network, and those who maintain them and promote them. They're a vital component to our economic prosperity and something that we should all be proud of.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various acts. This bill is very important for my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka; trails are very important for Parry Sound-Muskoka, which is, I would say, the preeminent tourism area in the province of Ontario. Of course, Muskoka, a couple of years ago, was rated the number one jurisdiction in the world for—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): There's a lot of chatter in the chamber. I'm going to ask the members from the government side that if you need to have a conversation with your colleagues please take it outside or do the indoor voice. Thank you.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you. As I was saying, Muskoka was rated as the number one tourism destination in the world by National Geographic magazine a few years ago, and Parry Sound has the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve and the beautiful east coast of Georgian Bay. It really is quite spectacular, and I encourage all members to visit the area. But for me, personally, trails are important. I remember, in my nomination meeting speech, talking about the importance of trails.

Of course, in Parry Sound-Muskoka we have snowmobile trails—and I'm going to come back to that in a minute—which are really important, but we have hiking trails, we have ATV trails. We have trails like the Seguin trail, which was the old J.R. Booth Railway line. We have some great cross-country ski trails.

This winter, I was able to go cross-country skiing at Georgian Nordic trails, just northeast of Parry Sound. I've skied many times at the Bracebridge resource centre.

I've skied at Arrowhead Provincial Park, which also has the famous skating trail that is over a couple of kilometres long.

This bill has caused problems in my riding.

It was an awful year for snowmobiling this year with the winter conditions we had. I have a couple of snowmobiles and had a couple of permits for the province of Ontario which I didn't actually get to use this year, mainly because of the conditions. When I had time, the conditions weren't right.

We've had negative reactions to misconceptions about this bill, and I want to get some of them on the record in the limited time I have.

I have the township of Perry, just north of the town of Huntsville, writing to the Premier with regard to Bill 100, saying:

"Whereas the provincial government has had the first reading of Bill 100, Supporting Ontario's Trails Act; and

"Whereas with the possibility of Bill 100 proceeding further, private property owners are in the process of revoking land use permits with our local snowmobile clubs and other OFSC snowmobile clubs throughout the province, thereby causing safety and economic concerns for our area; and

"Whereas the harmony between snowmobile clubs and private property owners is being undermined by the act;

"Now therefore be it resolved that the township of Perry petition the provincial government to take the necessary steps to immediately resolve the issue of snowmobile trails being closed due to the fact that private property owners feel their property rights may be taken away by the passage of Bill 100...."

I have also received a letter from the Snowcrest Riders, an independent snowmobile club in the Gravenhurst area. They wrote me a good letter with their concerns. I want to get the complete letter on the record. It's from Mr. Bob Clarke, who is the president:

"Hello Mr. Miller.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting you a few times. I have been the president of Snowcrest Riders Snowmobile Club for the past nine seasons. We have been very successful and you spoke of our organization in the House on November 4, 2013. We are the last Canadian snowmobile club to receive the International Snowmobile Club of the Year award and be inducted into the International Snowmobile Hall of Fame in 2013.

"I felt it very important that I inform you that Snowcrest Riders Snowmobile Club in Gravenhurst will have trail closures as of April 1, 2016. One trail closure affects our Top D trail south that features the bridge that crosses all four lanes of Highway 11, and our Beaver Creek bridge that was opened in February 2010. Combined, these bridges cost \$1.4 million, and were largely funded by provincial and federal dollars.

"As you are already aware, there have been a number of snowmobile trails in Muskoka that have been closed due to concerns landowners have with the proposed Bill 100, Ontario Trails Act. I anticipate there will be more closures to come. I have been on a small committee with our OFSC district 7, that has had some dialogue with you.

"A number of the local businesses that rely on snowmobile tourism dollars are suffering. We also have the Trans Canada Trail system for hiking and biking that I fear will be affected as well.

"I have had discussions with some of our landowners, and I want to share some of the dialogue with you. See below.

"I spoke to a Snowcrest landowner yesterday. Landowners have informed Snowcrest Riders by letter that they will be removing permission for use of their property as of April 1, 2016 due to concerns with Bill 100.

"Their concern is that even though the minister states that easements will be voluntary and that no government is going to impose an easement on their property without their consent, the bill is not clear on this. Their concern is that because the Bill 100 does not have this wording, it is open to interpretation. Therefore, they believe that our current minister may interpret the Bill 100 to state easements are voluntary, but the next minister may have a different interpretation, because the wording is not clear. Therefore, these landowners do not care about what we say, or what the minister's statement said, they want this minister's wording in Bill 100, so it is clear for all.

0950

"Mr. Miller, the landowners I have talked to want section 12 of proposed Bill 100 to be amended to include the simple wording below that Minister Michael Coteau has already stated."

That is, "'an easement pursuant to Bill 100, if passed, would be a voluntary agreement between a landowner and an eligible body or bodies. No property owner would be compelled to provide an easement unless they agreed to do so.'

"Add the above statement from the minister to section 12 of Bill 100, and we may address the concerns of the landowner."

He goes on to say, "My personal note is, why does Bill 100 need to mention easements, period?"

"There is already a process available in every municipality regarding establishing easements on private property.

"I understand the minister has offered to make available staff or himself, to speak to concerned groups if requested. I will wait for your reply, to determine if I will be making that request."

I think that states very clearly how the bill is having the effect of closure of some snowmobile trails, and some really important ones. There has been a lot of money spent on the bridge crossing the four-lane Highway 11, which was an amazing accomplishment for the Snowcrest Riders, to get that built.

As the member from Lennox-Frontenac—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Norm Miller: —Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington stated—he's got the longest riding association name in the Legislature, I think—there are some benefits to this bill, which have been largely overshadowed by the concerns with the easement section. There's the doing

away with the limit of \$1,000 for suing for damage, for trespassing on private property, so that's an increased protection for property owners. There's a change in the limit on fines for trespassers on private property. It goes from \$2,000 to \$10,000. That's more protection for private property owners. There's a reduction in liability, and clarification of liability, for landowners. That's also a positive that is in this bill.

I just want to get on the record that trails are really important for the economy of Parry Sound–Muskoka and for rural Ontario. I hope the government will do what the snowmobile club has asked for and put the statement the minister has made into the bill. That's a fairly simple ask, and I think it will make lot of landowners feel more comfortable with this bill.

That will make me a lot happier too, because I want to see the trails open, not just for personal use but for the benefit of the economy of rural Ontario, for the benefit of Parry Sound–Muskoka and for all those volunteers who are involved in the various clubs, and in particular, the snowmobile clubs, which are huge in Parry Sound–Muskoka. I would like to see this work out.

I'll just get on the record in my last minute that the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs has a similar ask. They say, "Minister, to be clear"—I'm just taking one little section out—"the OFSC supports the elements within Bill 100 which will provide landowners and non-profit recreational trail organizations with enhanced protection and rights."

"We do, however, believe that Bill 100 would be much more palatable to our important landowner partners should section 12 be amended to provide greater clarity to the areas that are causing concern. As a consequence, we would be very supportive of any process for consultation and action that would accomplish this."

Madam Speaker, I say to the government: Make sure, when you do your consulting—and the committee that receives this bill after second reading—that you visit rural Ontario and listen to the landowners and listen to those people who are so important to keeping our trails open in the province of Ontario.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I'm not entirely familiar with the statement of the minister that he referred to, but I actually have to agree with him. If the minister has said there is an approach that will be of consequence, and that people should rely on the statement of a minister for ongoing administration of an act or overseeing of an act—the member has correctly said if you think that the statement is of consequence, is going to make a difference to landowners and to the act itself, then consideration should be given to putting it into the bill.

Ministers come and go; governments come and go. If in fact there's a stability, an assurance about the future

that landowners need to be part of this process, then what the member is asking for is entirely reasonable, something that should be discussed as this bill goes into committee.

The other day, my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek talked about the vulnerability, the fragility, of the trail system, that to a great extent it depends on the confidence that landowners have in the system to run well and to not impose undue burdens on them. It is not that hard to end a trail system.

I've been on the Bruce Trail—a gorgeous place—and I know there were times that I was going through farmers' fields. People, happily, have been pretty respectful. I didn't see litter; I didn't see any damage. Frankly, if the farmers hadn't allowed people to be on their land, the utility of that trail would have been dramatically reduced.

So putting in measures that will actually ensure comfort and confidence on the part of the landowners makes tons of sense for the landowners and for those who have the great and wonderful opportunity—the privilege—to wander through that countryside.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to be able to comment on the remarks by the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. I like to refer to him as "the member from my mother's cottage," up near Dorset, Ontario.

Dorset is a centrepiece of great trails up in Parry Sound–Muskoka. There is a section of the narrows between lower Trading Bay and upper Trading Bay that rarely freezes over in the winter. Particularly in the spring, as they're sitting at the narrows Restaurant and having a beer, the snowmobilers come by and they skip across the open water from the frozen section of upper Trading into lower Trading. The local volunteer firefighter is also a salvage scuba diver, where every year he makes a few extra shekels by recovering some of the snowmobiles that have gone down in that section.

It's great fun and it is an important tourism piece in the neighbourhood that I'm all too familiar with.

I appreciate the member's advocacy in this area, particularly around the issue around easements and how the easements will be arrived at. It's so very important, as the member from Lanark was talking about, that this will create an opportunity for voluntary discussions between the parties to sort out easements and protect the opportunities for the trails all the way across the north and rural Ontario.

Of course, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, I know what an important aspect in this bill and how it's been received—the consultation that we've had with various stakeholders across the province. I support very much the idea that we need to hear more from the affected communities. We'll talk with our House leaders to see if there is an opportunity so that we can see a bit of rural Ontario have more direct input by those who are most directly affected by this bill, as we go through the committee stage.

I appreciate the member's remarks, and I listened very carefully.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Dufferin–Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. If I may, I would like to congratulate you on your new role as Deputy Speaker. I think you'll do an excellent job. It's great to see you in the chair.

My colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka raised a number of very important number issues regarding Bill 100. I'm really pleased that we're talking about all of the great trails that are in our ridings. I wouldn't want to compete against Parry Sound–Muskoka, although I must say that in Dufferin–Caledon we have some beautiful trails in our own right: two major sections of the Bruce Trail, of course, the Trans Canada Trail, as well as a personal favourite, the Island Lake trail.

Section 12: There is a reason why people are concerned about section 12 in Bill 100. And as the member very reasonably articulated, there is a solution. We're already hearing rumours about cabinet shuffles and people being moved around. So while we have a statement from the current minister, it would be very helpful to actually put it in legislation. We all know that ministers move beyond their current portfolio. We leave this place; we move on. This legislation still remains on the books. So the clearer that we can make it, and the less opportunity for any confusion on the part of the landowners as well as the trail users and the organizations—it's incumbent on us to do that. I think this is the opportunity to do that, when we move it into committee. Let's make sure that the minister, who has already tried to clarify publicly how he wants it changed—let's put it in the legislation and make sure that future generations and future users aren't trying to interpret what we were doing when we passed Bill 100.

1000

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's a pleasure to stand here to contribute to the debate after the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka talked about this bill.

I think we're all in agreement that this bill is a positive step in the direction to bring together trail users, trail owners and maybe trailblazers. Doing that is a very productive thing, because there are people who are naturalists, there are people who want to have some physical activity; and to travel Ontario through trails in a natural setting is certainly a wonderful experience that people look forward to.

Increasing awareness and encouraging the use of trails are what this bill is about. It's to enhance trails and the trail experience, which we all agree should be done. Then it also wants to protect trails from today's generation for future generations. I think that's really important as well—maintenance and the overall protection of the use of the trails.

As they get used more often, we want to make sure those trails are sustained and they still maintain their inherent natural traits, so that they're not overused and abused, so to speak. But it is a very good thing that it's

opened up the discussion about easements and the voluntary piece of that, so that landowners can have the ability to make that decision based on conversations with the minister and people who use the trails.

It's a productive way to put a bill forward. I do appreciate that. I also agree that if the minister is going to make a statement and commit to something, it would give peace of mind to put that item in this bill so that it doesn't go challenged in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I think the wrap-up is needed. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the members from Beaches–East York, Dufferin–Caledon, Toronto–Danforth and London–Fanshawe for their comments.

I'd like to use this opportunity to thank our private landowners because without those private landowners, we just wouldn't have a trails network in the province of Ontario. They don't benefit from allowing a trail on the property; they do it out of the goodness of their heart. I'm sure in many cases they see the benefit of having trails in general, but they personally don't benefit.

The landowners are asking for something fairly simple, I think, and that is this statement: "An easement pursuant to Bill 100, if passed, would be a voluntary agreement between a landowner and an eligible body or bodies. No property owner would be compelled to provide an easement unless they agreed to do so." I think that's a fairly simple ask. I would really like to see the government put that into the bill, as the landowners are asking for that.

It's obvious that there was a fair amount of consultation done before the bill was introduced, but perhaps representation of some of the landowners was somehow missed. I would suggest, when the bill goes and has its committee work done, that the committee travel to parts of rural and northern Ontario to make it easy for landowners to add their comments to what they would like to see changed, if any parts of the bill—that they're given that opportunity, and they don't have to travel to Toronto to do that. That is my ask of the government.

Trails are very important in my riding and they're important for the province. I'd hate to see trail closures that don't need to happen. That will be bad for the province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Good morning, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 100 here this morning.

I have heard a lot about Bill 100 in my riding. As you know, I represent a beautiful riding in eastern Ontario, Prince Edward–Hastings, which stretches from the limestone shores of Lake Ontario in Prince Edward county all the way up through Belleville, through beautiful Centre Hastings and the Tweed, Madoc and Marmora area.

We've got some beautiful lakes there. Stoco Lake: There are some great trails around Stoco Lake, in the GTA—the other GTA, the greater Tweed area, we call that. And then stretching up north into North Hastings as

well, there are some magnificent trail systems stretching all the way through there.

The entire system is actually managed by the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance. I know they have received some funding in the past from upper levels of government, and they're doing a great job of making sure those trails are some of the best trails not just in Ontario but in the world. They are very, very important for businesses in my region, for tourism in my region, and for sportsmen in Prince Edward-Hastings as well. People come from far and wide.

I heard the member from Essex talking earlier this morning about the fact that he can just go across the top of the lake, because he doesn't have a trail system there, but he's more than welcome any time. I know he's been to my region before for some walleye fishing, but the trail system in eastern Ontario is unbelievable as well. There are actually 700 kilometres of trail in the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance, as I say, stretching from that limestone bed all the way into the granite in the north of North Hastings and Bancroft, the mineral capital of the world.

I was very pleased to have the Bancroft chamber of commerce here earlier this week on Prince Edward-Hastings day to talk about the Rockhound Gemboree, which is world-famous. If you have a four-wheeler, you should stop up in the summer, take the trail to Bancroft and check out the mineral museum that's there. It's first-class and you can see some of the great minerals that have been mined over the centuries up in North Hastings.

The thing is that this bill, Bill 100, has created a little bit of confusion out there—a lot of confusion, in some cases. I think what needs to happen is that there needs to be a public relations strategy on behalf of the government to ensure that all landowners understand exactly what is being proposed in Bill 100, because the confusion does exist.

I agree with the premise of Bill 100, that there should be a little bit more surety on behalf of landowners, and the trails organizations as well, when it comes to the easement issue. There are those in certain segments of the community that believe that the easement is going to be forced on them as a result of Bill 100. That's not the case. They're not going to be forced to agree to anything that they don't want to agree to.

As was mentioned earlier by the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, if we didn't have the agreements with the landowners, we wouldn't have the trail system that we have in eastern Ontario right now. But, again, I just want to stress: No one is going to have their arms tied behind their back and be forced to sign an easement to have a trail running through their property. For decades, these landowners have agreed. What this bill intends to do, as far as I can tell, is add some confidence to the groups that are running the trails or maintaining the trails and add some confidence for the landowner as well in agreeing to an easement over a set period of time.

One of the stories that I was told by one of the organizations that operates the trails is this: There was a beautiful piece of property that a trail was running

through, and on that piece of property there was a stream or a small waterway that went through the person's property. The snowmobile organization wanted to build a bridge over that stream so that the four-wheelers or the snowmobiles in the wintertime could pass over that. There's quite a cost involved with that, Madam Speaker. It's not just a couple of hundred bucks; it's several thousand dollars to build a bridge up to code over a stream like that.

What happened was, the club had an agreement with the landowner to build the bridge over the stream. I believe it was a couple of hundred thousand dollars to build this bridge. After the bridge was built, the landowner said, "No, we're not going to let you use that property anymore." So as you can see, the organization has put out the capital—a lot of money—and the next thing you know, we're not allowed to use this section of the trail any longer. We want to protect the clubs from this type of thing happening.

On the other hand, we want to protect the property owners as well, and future property owners. If you own a glorious piece of land up on Stoco Lake, Madam Speaker, and you have a handshake agreement with a trails club to use that piece of property, and then you decide you're going to leave Stoco Lake to move back to the city—I don't know anyone who has ever done that; it usually works the other way around. But if you were going to sell your property, that actual easement would be registered with the land registry office so that when that potential new landowner comes in to purchase that property, they'll see that there's an easement on that property for five years, if that's what the agreement was, or 10 years.

If you bought that property and then you found out there's a trail system running through your property and you have an easement on your land registry, you won't be surprised. You'll know when your lawyers, who are doing the real estate deal, look up all of the details on that piece of property at the land registry office. They'll know that there is an easement there and no one will be surprised by that.

Unfortunately, I think what happened in this case is that—the government did it with the best of intentions, again. They brought forward Bill 100 with the best of intentions, but maybe didn't communicate early enough in the process with those who were integral to making sure that this worked. That allowed a couple of groups to spread some information out there that wasn't entirely correct and has a lot of people worried and contacting my office. I haven't had droves of people, but I certainly have had a few concerned landowners who have written and called my office with really strong concerns about their land being taken away from them. That's not the case when it comes to this bill.

I'd like to thank my colleague the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington. He's my neighbour. We share trails in that Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance. Of course, he'll promote Silent Lake or some of the other great lakes that are in his area—mine are better—but the trail is beautiful and it stretches all the way through. He's done a lot of work on this bill and he's

also done a lot of work in trying to correct some of the issues that are being miscommunicated to the public in regard to this bill. I really think, in a lot of cases, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has done a better job than the government has in straightening out some of the miscommunication that exists in the community.

I give him full marks for his efforts in making sure that this bill, which is well-intentioned, ensures that we continue to have the best trail system in Ontario, in North America and even in the world—something that is a little bit more concrete and something we know is going to exist—and that those agreements are going to be in place. It gives some surety to the whole process so that our sportsmen can enjoy those trails. They're great for walking, for horseback riding and, of course, for the use of all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles.

People in my neck of the woods, that's what they do. They buy a four-wheeler, they buy a utility vehicle, they buy a snowmobile and they look forward to the fact that when the snow comes, they're going to get out their Arctic Cat or their Ski-Doo and they're going to have a great time on the trails in our region. It's big business. There are people who come from all over to use the trails in eastern Ontario.

I commend the government for bringing forward Bill 100 to make sure that the agreements that we have with our landowners are there for years and years to come; that those who are promoting Prince Edward–Hastings, North Hastings and Centre Hastings as a great place to come and spend their tourism dollars—that those are there for years to come; and that we can continue to support our local businesses in our region. We have many, many bed and breakfasts, hotels and restaurants that depend on people coming in on their snowmobiles and their ATVs, or just enjoying the great outdoors in one of the most beautiful places in Ontario to spend a long weekend. That, of course, is Prince Edward–Hastings, Ontario.

Thank you for the time this morning.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing it is almost 10:15, we're going to recess the House until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise and welcome the representatives from the eye physicians and surgeons, who are here for their annual lobby day. In the gallery today are Dr. Kylen McReelis, Dr. Andrew Budning, Dr. Tim Hillson and executive director Amanda Meek. I hope that the members will take the time to come and speak with them this evening in the dining room. I want to thank them for coming to Queen's Park.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Today our page captain is Sabrina Arcuri, from the great riding of Oak Ridges–

Markham. In the east members' gallery, we are joined by her grandmother, who is Reza Moridi's lovely wife, Pari Moridi; the mother of Sabrina, Marjan Arcuri, and her sister Sara Arcuri.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Today, I think, is a very special day in the House. We all collectively, as members, hosted and welcomed the first-ever OPSEU corrections lobby day. We had a very good breakfast with many correctional workers.

I want to introduce Smokey Thomas, president of OPSEU; Monte Vieselmeyer, who is the chair of the management employee relations committee; Greg Arnold, who is a MERC member; Alex Sawicki, who is also a MERC member; Sean Dunn, who is a member of the provincial health and safety committee; Mike Lundy, who is the vice-chair of the provincial health and safety committee and local president for Thunder Bay jail; Shawn Bradshaw, local president for Thunder Bay Correctional Centre; Denis Collin, who is the local union president for the Ottawa–Carleton Detention Centre; Scott McIntyre, who is a Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services probation and parole officer, and the probation and parole health and safety worker rep; and Danielle Du Sablon, who is also a probation and parole officer, and secretary of OPSEU Local 221.

Speaker, most importantly, I want to welcome all the brave and hard-working correctional officers and probation and parole officers who are with us here in this House. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome Joel Bissonnette, from Sarnia–Lambton, who is the corrections officer in charge of the union in Sarnia.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is also my pleasure and privilege to welcome the correctional officers and probation and parole officers from across Ontario. I have a long list; I'll get to it.

Welcome to Todd Snider, Joel Bissonnette, Randy Simpraga, Wendy Krusto, Danielle Du Sablon, Lorraine Skitch, Rebecca Currie, Ryan Graham, Chad Oldfield, John Mengia, Denise Sidsworth, Mike Kirlaw, Glenna Caldwell, Gord Longhi, Autumn Butsch, Chris Butsch, Sean Dunn, Chris Jackel, Alex Sawicki, Richard Dionne, Todd Hockey, Denis Collin, Jonny Coffey, Vanessa Thompson, Shawn Bradshaw, Monte Vieselmeyer, Kathy Hoffman, Dianna Fedun, Joy Wallace, Rob Nimer, Jim Steenson, Jason Mushynski, Patricia Giroux, Scott McIntyre, Chantal Breton, Ken Steinbrunner, Joey Guillemette, Ian Turpin, Barb Friday, Raff Tassone, Kyla Moen, James Nowe, Mike Lundy and Greg Arnold. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: From my riding of Barrie, I would like to welcome Dr. Jonathan Douglas, president of the Ontario Psychological Association.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to again introduce Andree Martin from CUPE, with the paramedics, and Todd Snider, with OPSEU corrections division.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to introduce, in the west gallery, Craig Foye, staff lawyer for the Hamilton

Community Legal Clinic; and Laura Cattari, writer and community advocate. She also sits on the round table for poverty reduction in Hamilton.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I also want to welcome the corrections workers and probation and parole officers, and adult and youth workers who are here. Some of those from Thunder Bay that have not yet been welcomed are Raff Tassone, Rob Gordon and Barb Friday. Welcome to all of you.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I would also like to welcome the CUPE paramedics I met with this morning: Randy Barnes, Adam Payne, along with Andree Martin. Welcome, wherever you may be.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I also want to welcome CUPE paramedics to the House today. Thank you for coming out.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Joining us in the east gallery today are C.J. Jeyanathan and Conner Robertson. C.J. is the president of the Don Valley East youth riding association. Welcome, C.J.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park today CUPE paramedic Chris Day, who I'll be meeting with later this afternoon, along with three of his colleagues joining us today at Queen's Park.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to introduce two paramedics who are here as part of paramedic day and thank them for their life-saving work: Jim Simpson and Michael Kruse.

I'd also like to introduce two visitors who are here to spend a day with their favourite MPP: Debbie Levere and Sylvia Giordino.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to welcome to the gallery today Antoin Diamond, from the Bruce Trail; Patrick Connor, from the Ontario Trails Council; Sylvain Roy, from the Ontario Psychological Association; and Gareth Jones, from the correctional officers' OPSEU union.

Mr. Michael Harris: Today's page captain is MacFarlane Benham from Kitchener-Conestoga. Here to watch him hard at work are his mom, Jenny MacFarlane Benham, and his father, Jeff Benham. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to welcome correction officers Randy Simpraga, from my riding of Essex; Kyla Moen, from Kenora; and James Nowe, from Kenora.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like to welcome John Mengia, who is the president of Local 252 Niagara Detention Centre, OPSEU.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to welcome the correctional officers and paramedics from Elgin-Middlesex-London. I'd also like to welcome Dr. McReelis, Dr. Hillson, Dr. Nijhawan and Amanda Meek, from the Eye Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I see in the gallery, from my area, Jeff van Pelt and Tiffany Balducci, here from CUPE Ontario on behalf of the paramedics. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Please join me in welcoming my wife, Pari Moridi; my granddaughter Sara Arcuri; and my daughter, Marjan Arcuri.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to welcome paramedic Mr. Laurie Le Maitre to Queen's Park today. I'll be meeting with him to discuss paramedic issues right after question period.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm pleased to welcome to Queen's Park today Dr. Sylvain Roy and Ms. Jan Kasperski—a constituent of mine—from the Ontario Psychological Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to welcome all paramedics here from Durham region, and paramedics from York region, since that's where my daughter works as a paramedic. Welcome.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome my good friend Fred Hahn today, the president of CUPE Ontario—welcome to Queen's Park—and, along with him, all the paramedics who are in the House for their lobby day. Welcome and thank you for your service to our communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

With us today in the Speaker's gallery is the new consul general of India to Toronto, Mr. Dinesh Bhatia. Please welcome our new consul general.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, on a point of order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Just to correct my record, this morning during debate on Bill 100, there were comments made that were not intended for, or directed at, anybody in this House but for people outside this House. I just want to correct my record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That's a clarification.

I would also remind members—I can't read minds. So if I hear unparliamentary language, I'm making the assumption that two things can happen. One is that you can try to say something indirectly that you cannot say directly. You cannot say anything in terms of quotes or whatever.

The clarification is accepted, as long as it was not a quote with an intent to make any kind of unparliamentary language. So thank you for that clarification.

1040

ORAL QUESTIONS

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Today, we are joined by correctional officers and staff from around the province. They are here to tell you about the growing crisis in corrections, a crisis that this government continues to ignore. The poor quality of Ontario's jails and their persistent lockdowns are putting correctional officers' lives at risk. We've already had an officer

taken hostage at the Thunder Bay jail, and the government's response was minimal.

How many more correctional officers have to be injured; how many more correctional officers have to be taken hostage before we see serious action from this government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, I want to welcome the officers to the Legislature today. I know that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is going to want to say more, Mr. Speaker.

We're committed to transformation in corrections in Ontario. It is what we believe in. It's why we're hiring more officers. Since 2013, we've hired 710 new correctional officers. We'll be hiring 2,000 more correctional officers over the next three years.

We understand there is a need for more personnel. We also understand that there is a need for support for training. We've trained an additional 138 new correctional officers. Those trainings are under way. But beyond that, we recognize that there is a need for an overall look at how we approach corrections in this province, and that is under way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier. I remind the Premier of my visit to the Thunder Bay correctional facility. I could not believe that working conditions could exist in Ontario like I saw at the Thunder Bay jail. The mayor of Thunder Bay called it a "rathole." The infrastructure in our correctional facilities in many parts of the province is completely inadequate.

I'm sure the Premier would never work in these conditions that I saw, so I repeat, for the third time, my challenge and question to the Premier. As I've done before, I'm asking, will the Premier visit the jail in Thunder Bay, the correctional facility in Thunder Bay, to truly appreciate the conditions? And if Thunder Bay is too far, will the Premier visit any correctional facility? It's not good enough to say you went four or five years ago for ribbon-cutting. Will you see the conditions today? Yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reason the transformation is under way, the reason officers are being hired, the reason that in the minister's mandate letter there is a focus on transformation in corrections is that I have already visited. I understand there is a real need for change in corrections.

I also recognize that in this country provincial jurisdictions are working under challenging circumstances, given decisions that were made at the federal level. We need to focus on how we prepare people who are in our correctional institutions for reintegration into society. We need to make sure that conditions corrections officers are working in are safe. That's why the transformation is the focus of the minister, and that's why the transformation is under way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: A visit years and years ago isn't good enough, and I repeat my challenge: Will the Premier visit a correctional facility in the near future?

Now, there's a simple first-step solution that I could recommend to the Premier. The body scanners in the Toronto South Detention Centre should be in every correctional facility in Ontario immediately.

During my visit to the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, I was told by a correctional officer that the smuggling of drugs is rampant—17 Kinder eggs from one inmate were full of drugs. I've heard in other correctional facilities about ceramic knives being smuggled in.

Smokey Thomas has called on the government to take a task force beyond just Ottawa but across the whole province. This is a reasonable proposition that the government should follow.

My question is, will the government take real, meaningful steps, like setting up a task force, like having these body scanners not next year but immediately? Will you do the right thing? Will you take these steps this spring?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

The Premier referred to the Minister of Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker.

On this side of the House, we've been absolutely clear on this issue, that the status quo in our correctional system cannot continue. We are very much focused on working along with our correctional partners. The fact that they're here, and the fact that we have been having very productive meetings, demonstrates that we are focused on developing solutions.

Let me be very clear: Our solutions are not what—the Leader of the Opposition, when he sat, along with the Harper government, and brought on down-on-crime policies, that has resulted in the kinds of challenges in overcrowding that we are seeing. That is not the solution that we are talking about. Neither of you are talking about the solutions that the Conservatives brought by privatizing jails in this province. Those are not the solutions we are talking about.

I invite the member opposite: Stop the rhetoric and start talking about concrete solutions that are going to result in ensuring—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

LOBBYISTS

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. When the Premier was scribbling her new plan on the back of a napkin at her kitchen table, there was one glaring omission.

I appreciate that the Premier has no interest in input or consultation with other parties or—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Start the clock.

It's very difficult to ask one side to come to order when the other side is provoking, so if you were to stop, I would be able to do something about it.

Please finish your question.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I realize input is not welcome. It's the Liberal Party's way. It's the Premier's way or the highway. But one glaring omission is about lobbying reform.

Over the last 13 years, there has been a steady stream of staff leaving the Premier's and ministers' offices to become influential lobbyists, lobbyists who in turn wrote big cheques to the Liberal Party from their new employers.

Although the Premier claims that she will put a stop to the donations, it doesn't solve all the problems. It's inadequate; it's short.

Mr. Speaker, when the cash dries up, what is stopping Liberal friends from influencing the government's decisions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Leader of the Opposition knows that we have made changes in terms of the rules surrounding lobbyists. One of the questions that we have before us is, are there other changes that need to be made? I would be happy to hear from the Leader of the Opposition—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —if he has proposals on how he thinks the lobbying process should be changed. We have made changes. We have tightened up those rules. I would be happy to hear any input that he has on that.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, second time.

Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Maybe the Premier forgot the page of her napkin on her kitchen table.

I understand that lobbying is legitimate, but a simple cooling-off period between leaving a minister's office and working as a lobbyist makes sense. That's the standard practice in other provinces—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I guess maybe my signalling that I'm going after individuals hasn't come through yet. I'll reverse my politeness to a heavy hand. I don't care to do it, but I will.

Please.

Mr. Patrick Brown: It appears I've touched a sensitive topic of defending Liberal lobbyists.

We can't have senior staff advising the Premier today and then lobbying for policy changes tomorrow. There has to be a cooling-off period. If the Premier's reform

plan is so comprehensive, why has she been so silent on changing the lobbying rules in our province? Why leave these giant loopholes in the reform?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In the meeting that I had with the leaders of the opposition parties, I said to them that I was interested in hearing from them on specific changes that they thought needed to be put in place. The—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I specifically had the meeting with them in order to elicit that input. I still stand ready to hear their input on the substance of what they think should be in the legislation.

We will bring in two pieces of legislation, as I told them. We'll bring in the legislation in the spring around the fundraising rules, but then in the fall, we will bring in another piece of legislation that will deal with other election issues.

I'm open to their suggestions. I have said that there may be changes to the lobbying process that need to be put in place. I'd be happy to hear their concrete suggestions.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: The notion that input is welcome is laughable. The only direction we got from the Premier is that this process would be dictated by the Premier's office, run by the Liberal Party and that the opinions of everyone else don't count with this government.

I can tell you that there are numerous examples of why we need to address lobbying reform. A senior staffer leaves the energy minister's office only to take a job with a renewable energy company seeking project approval from that same minister. During that time, he personally donates to the Liberal Party 194 times. This just doesn't look right to the people of Ontario. It isn't right. They want rules. The people of Ontario want rules to be put into place to protect the public's interest.

Will the Premier commit to a lobbying cooling-off period for former government staff? Yes or no? Do you support that concept?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, no. You come to order.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's time that the people of Ontario actually stood where the Leader of the Opposition stands. Do you support a ban on corporate donations? Yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. To the Chair.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not kidding. Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Does the Leader of the Opposition support a ban on union donations? Yes or no? Does the Leader of the Opposition support controls on third-party advertising? Yes or no? Does the Leader of the Opposition believe that we need to reduce the maximum—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm charged with trying to make sure that the mood is reasonable. It's not helpful when, even if you're attempting to use third person, you point at someone. You're speaking to the Chair. Point at me.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'd like to know if the Leader of the Opposition supports constraints on loans and loan guarantees. Yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just when I'm able to get that directed, it starts on this side. You're not helpful either.

Please finish. Wrap up.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: And does the Leader of the Opposition believe that we need to reform by-election donations? Yes or no? Let's get on with it.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Jails in Ontario are overcrowded and understaffed, and that means too many inmates and not enough corrections workers. It's not hard to see that this is a recipe for jails and a system that are unsafe for everyone. Riots and violence and even deaths have become the norm under this Liberal government's watch.

But when it comes to the new PTSD legislation, the Premier left out bailiffs and probation and parole officers, even though all corrections workers are doing their best in a system that is unsafe for them and for inmates.

When will corrections workers and inmates actually see safe jails in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I say to the corrections officers, I'm pleased that they're here.

I assume that the leader of the third party would agree with our move to hire 710 new correctional officers and 2,000 more over the next three years because we agree that there needs to be change in our corrections system. It's why the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is working on a transformation.

As he said, we are working on supports, like mental health supports, making sure that there is training, making sure there's more staff so that the environment is safer, so that corrections officers have a better environment within which to work. Also, we're creating a system that will work to rehabilitate people so that they can be reintegrated into society. That has not been the focus, certainly, from the federal level. That has not been the focus of corrections in this country. It is the focus of this government, and that's the direction that the transformation is moving in.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, everybody sees the transformation that's happening in the corrections system. It speaks volumes when the Premier's minister doesn't even seem to know what's going on in jails, not even the one in his own community. Not only was he completely unaware, but he went on to deny the fact that inmates are forced to sleep in showers in the Ottawa detention centre. Not only is this inhumane, of course, but it creates an even more dangerous work environment for the corrections officers and workers in the facility.

After admitting that he was wrong, the minister then promised that inmates would no longer be sleeping in shower stalls anymore. Has the government fixed Ottawa's overcrowding? Where did all those inmates go?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: On this side of the House, we are very much focused on working, along with our correctional workers, to make sure that we are bringing meaningful changes. Last year was a challenging year with labour negotiations. But Speaker, I will say to you that we have come a long way in terms of ensuring that there was no strike and that we were able to reach an agreement that all parties are satisfied with. But now, most importantly, we're working together in ensuring that we come up with a concrete action plan as to how we change the system.

What we really need to do, from all members of this House, is to come up with those ideas. It's easy to point to the problem. We all know what the challenges in the system are. A real opportunity that is in front of us is to come up with those long-lasting transformational changes that will ensure that we focus on rehabilitation and reintegration as opposed to just punishing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Instead of actually dealing with systemic issues, what we see is things flaring up in London, in Hamilton, in Thunder Bay and in Toronto South. The Liberals chose to put their focus on taking our corrections system to the brink. This government spent millions of dollars getting ready for a strike instead of investing in solutions to fix the problems, regardless of what this minister claims.

The Liberal government has made this made-in-Ontario crisis. They made this crisis, and it is on their hands. It is bigger than just one ministry, because, for example, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care cut psychiatric beds and mental health supports—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Agriculture, come to order.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —and those vulnerable individuals often find their way into our justice and corrections system.

Will the Premier acknowledge that when she's cutting health care, cutting education, cutting social services and

cutting public housing, she's creating brand new problems in corrections?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think this bluster undermines the good faith and goodwill that exists within our correctional system for the first time in a long, long time—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: We have goodwill and a good working relationship for the first time in a long time within the correctional system from all our partners, including community partners, to actually move forward and develop a concrete action plan that will change the system. Warehousing more individuals in our corrections system is not the answer. What we need to really focus on is how to better rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals back into the community.

We have a lot of work to do to undermine the 10 years of damage that the Harper government and the Leader of the Opposition brought into our system, and to ensure—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. Does the Premier believe, Speaker, that rules governing democratic fairness should be made fairly and democratically, or does she believe that one person and one party should be making all the rules?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, here's the process that we are putting forward: We will introduce draft legislation in the spring, and then that legislation, instead of going to committee hearings after second reading, will actually go to committee hearings after first reading, if we can get agreement. That will allow for two rounds of consultation with people across the province. We will be able to have consultation and input throughout the summer and into the fall. I look forward to that.

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Many of the issues I raised with the leaders of the opposition parties and with the leader of the Green Party, hoping for input. I did get some input from the leader of the Green Party. I'm looking for some input from the opposition leaders. But more than that, I'm looking for input from people across the province: from experts, from academics, from members of civil society—all those people that the leader of the third party thinks we should hear from. We're looking forward to that input.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When Mike Harris arbitrarily changed election rules in 1998, the member for St. Catharines said it was an "anti-democratic strategy, hatched in the backrooms." Dalton McGuinty said, "You can't change the rules of the game without the consent of all the players involved."

Can the Premier explain why it's anti-democratic if Mike Harris does it, but if Liberals do it, it's non-partisan and consultative?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I understand that the leader of the third party is preoccupied with the process. On this side of the House, we want to get on with making the changes.

My question to the leader of the third party is, does she support the ban on union donations—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are plenty of people who are out of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, that's a yes-or-no question.

Another yes-or-no question: Does the leader of the opposition support a ban on corporate donations, yes or no? What about third-party advertising rules? How about maximum spending limits on third-party advertising, yes or no?

Do we need to reduce the maximum donations? We want an answer from the leader of the third party. Does she support it or does she not support it? How about loan guarantees? Is there support for restrictions and rules around loans and loan guarantees?

The people of this province want us to get on with it, and so do we.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Liberals conveniently pretend not to get it. We need to get the big money out of politics, obviously. It's time to ban those corporate and union donations for sure. But we need to get there with a modicum of credibility. That's the point. Deciding the rules for a democratic system in the Premier's office does not pass the smell test, end of story. It is an undemocratic process, hatched in the backrooms.

Will this Premier commit to an open, democratic process and a fast-moving panel that involves all of the major political parties, civil society, academics and non-partisan experts—the way it should be done in a true democracy?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The leader of the third party is again talking about process. On this side, we think it's time to move forward with changes that the people expect us to do.

What I'd like to know is, does the leader of the third party believe that we need a reduction in overall spending limits in election periods and between elections, yes or no? Does the leader of the third party believe that we need new leadership and nomination campaign spending limits and donation rules, yes or no?

The time has come to move on with it. We have a perfectly democratic process through this Legislature, where we have already determined that we're going to get lots of input in a timely manner because we want this work to be done.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Over the past few weeks, many were shocked to learn that inmates

were being housed in showers at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre. What's even more shocking is that the minister had to backtrack after he had denied that such conditions existed.

The community advisory board report that the ministry sat on for months last year directly called on the minister to address overcrowding in the jail. Why did the minister ignore all the evidence for so long that Ontario's corrections system is in crisis and it's leading to chaos in corrections?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, let me be absolutely clear: It is totally unacceptable to house any inmate in any shower cell. As soon as I found out that that practice had taken place, I issued a directive to ensure that that practice is permanently put to an end.

In addition, in order to deal with some of the challenges that are taking place at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre, I have created a task force, which is being led by my deputy minister. The task force had its first meeting just yesterday. It has, of course, members from my ministry but it also has representation from the union. It has community members, such as from the Elizabeth Fry Society and the Mothers Offering Mutual Support group; members from the community advisory board; and, in addition, crown and defence counsel, so that we can work together and create both near-term and long-term solutions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Back to the minister: Deplorable conditions just don't appear overnight. The crisis in corrections may have been avoided if government officials simply listened to the pleas for help coming from the front lines.

When I raised the question about safety issues at the Toronto South Detention Centre, staff were immediately issued a warning memo on confidentiality. Speaker, that's unacceptable. Safety concerns raised by front-line staff throughout Ontario must be welcomed and encouraged. Instead, we have a government that has tried unsuccessfully to muzzle correctional staff.

My question is simply this: Will the minister show leadership and apologize on behalf of his ministry for trying to silence correctional staff who tried desperately to get this government to address safety concerns?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As I said earlier, we are very much interested in developing solutions together, and I sincerely ask the member opposite—I know he intends well—to provide solutions. Let's work together to deal with this very complex problem in a manner that brings everybody together.

If his solution is, as his party has suggested in the past, to privatize jails, we absolutely reject that notion. That is not where we're going to go. We need to work together, along with our correctional workers, to find meaningful ways not only to reduce overcrowding in our jails by reforming the bail system—and the federal government has a very important role to play—but also to make sure that we've got appropriate supports within our correctional institutions and also in a community setting by

benefiting from the expertise of our probation and parole officers so that we can ensure better reintegration.

We welcome ideas and solutions. Let's work together and make it happen.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Catherine Fife: This question is to the Premier. The Premier wrote her plan for how all elections will be financed by herself, at home, two days before she met with the opposition members. It's not clear she even consulted with her own caucus. She hasn't consulted with experts, she hasn't consulted with civil society, and she certainly hasn't listened to Ontarians.

Why is she stubbornly refusing a process that includes all major political parties, civil society and non-partisan experts, and instead choosing to go it alone?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've known the member for Kitchener-Waterloo for a very long time. She used to be a school community adviser with the Toronto board of education. I know she worked in the community very well and I know that she understands how process works. I know she understands that, when there are important decisions to be made, everybody needs to do their work. Everybody needs to look at the options. Everybody needs to come forward with a synthesis of the ideas that they have looked at and to sound those out with other people and then come up with a solution.

So I'm really surprised that this member, who understands that so well, wouldn't understand that we all have to do this work. Every one of us who wants to have input into this process has to think about what the options are, has to consider those options and then has to enter into a broader process.

That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker. We're going to bring legislation forward. We're expanding the consultation period. We want to hear input from people around the province, and we would love to hear where—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Hon. Michael Coteau: What do you think? Tell us what you think.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: How many napkins do you want us to bring?

Mr. Paul Miller: We'll bring our own napkins.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just when I was ready to admonish.

Supplementary?

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Ms. Catherine Fife: Let's remember: In the 2016 budget, the Premier established a number of new panels. In the past, this Premier created panels on how many bottles of beer someone can buy and where they can buy them. The word "consultation" appears in the 2016 budget more than 50 times. Clearly, the problem isn't that the Premier refuses to hold consultations or conversations, or doesn't like independent panels. She needs to

remember that our democracy belongs to all of us, not the Liberal Party.

Can the Premier explain to Ontarians why she thinks she alone should be making the rules for how our democracy functions, and why she is stubbornly refusing an open, transparent consultation by establishing a fast-moving independent panel on election fairness?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I do think that this should be a democratic process. I think that having the legislative process, putting the legislative process in place on—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is the democratic process, Mr. Speaker. It is exactly the democratic process that we're proposing be used.

I think the third party, by suggesting that the process in this Legislature to put policy forward is not democratic—is a pretty outrageous statement, Mr. Speaker. I think that the third party doesn't want to talk about the substance. I think that the third party wants to talk about process because they don't want to talk about the substance, because they want to delay. I want to make sure that we have a process in place that allows us to move by January 1, 2017, to have those rules in place. I think the third party wants to delay beyond that. We're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Education.

The Child Care and Early Years Act provides a new legislative framework to increase access and oversight in Ontario's child care sector. Minister, it is important for our government to give children the best possible start in life.

I was surprised to hear the concerns from my constituents about changes to ratios and regulations that would impact families. Constituents in my riding of York South–Weston are raising concerns about the proposed changes to the child care regulations. Speaker, through you to the minister, could she please tell us, and tell everyone in this House, what our government is doing to address these concerns?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you to the member for York South–Weston for the question.

The proposed regulatory changes were posted for public feedback from February 1 to April 1 of this year. During this period we engaged with families and stakeholders, and did receive extensive feedback on the proposed regulations.

I want to assure you and everyone else here this morning, Speaker, that we have heard the concerns raised, and I want to be clear that the regulations as posted will

not be implemented. We will be taking another look at some of the proposed regulations and will be engaging with our sector, the child care sector, on a plan moving forward that makes changes to reflect the concerns that have been voiced. We will continue to consult and revisit where changes need to be made in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you to the minister for her answer. It is reassuring to hear that the concerns of my constituents in York South–Weston are being taken seriously.

I know how important it is for our government to continue to provide high-quality and safe child care. I'm well aware that our government wants to ensure that we are increasing access to child care for families across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, through you, could the minister tell us how else our government will continue to modernize Ontario's child care and early years system, and how we can ensure that the concerns of my constituents and other families in Ontario continue to be heard?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Since 2003, our government has doubled child care funding to more than \$1 billion annually. The number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario has grown to nearly 351,000 spaces, an increase of 87% in the number of licensed spaces. We're also creating 4,000 new child care spaces as a result of a \$120-million capital investment over three years to construct new child care spaces in new schools.

But I do want to be clear: The regulation on the ratios as posted will not be implemented. Changes will be made, and we will ensure that there are options for parents. We have heard the concerns that have been raised and we will work with the sector to find a solution.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. On July 28, 2015, wpd Canada filed a court application about its proposed project to build eight 500-foot-high wind turbines near the Collingwood airport. They wanted the court to force the Ministry of the Environment to make a decision on their project; wpd had gotten tired of waiting, Mr. Speaker.

On September 22, the government filed a notice with the court saying that it intended to fight the application. Two days later, on September 24, the Ontario Liberal Party deposited a donation from wpd in the amount of \$6,000. The court application never went ahead, and the ministry approved the project in February of this year.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell us why the Liberal Party was accepting donations from wpd while it was fighting the company in court?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Let's just first break this down: The process involved in this involves a director-level decision, which I do not and cannot interfere with. As I said to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, it's our job to protect the integrity of the system.

It then goes to the Environmental Review Tribunal, another—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a fairly clear and transparent process.

Second, we have some of the strongest fundraising rules in Canada, across this country. I've said this before, Mr. Speaker. I know all 107 members of this House reasonably well. I know them to be honourable people who are decent people, who came here to be honest, to work with integrity and to serve their people. To suggest otherwise is just really, really, really low, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Some of the comments I heard were not—I wish I could assign them to somebody, because I would.

Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the minister: That \$6,000 donation is the largest single donation that wpd had ever given to the Liberal Party. In March 2014, the ministry asked wpd for an updated report on their wind turbine application. That same month, wpd donated \$3,000 to the Liberal Party, their second-largest donation. Two months later, in May, wpd submitted that updated report to the ministry, and that same month wpd donated a further \$2,000 to the Liberal Party, their third-largest donation.

Every time it looked like the project was in jeopardy, a donation was made to the Liberal Party of Ontario. These facts only reinforce the need for a public inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister seriously expect the people in my riding to believe that these donations had absolutely nothing to do with his approval of the wpd project?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. There are some very large temptations to speak while I'm standing and while I've gotten people's attention, and it's going to stop.

Minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The short answer is yes, Mr. Speaker.

The second part of this: Let's go back to the process. The member, who is a former Minister of the Environment knows how bulletproof these processes are. MOECC conducted one of its most comprehensive reviews to ensure that wpd's proposal would meet our stringent requirements. The Ontario Renewable Energy Approval process ensures that extensive consultation takes place with the public, aboriginal groups and local governments. We extended a six-month review over two years and considered 350 public and agency submissions. Finally, again, the point I made earlier: These decisions are made by public officials.

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Mr. Speaker, to be very clear about this: I have been in public life municipally and provincially. I've conducted myself to a very high personal standard. I know the member opposite. I know him to be a person of great

character. I know him because he was a minister before, and I hope he—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A general reminder to all members: to the Chair.

New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Advocates for public health care released a new report this morning called Ontario's Hospitals Cut Beyond All Limits. I think the title says it all. It lays out in painstaking detail the full extent of the Liberal cuts to Ontario hospitals.

The work of the Ontario Health Coalition confirms what patients are seeing across our province. Under this Premier's watch, the crisis of cuts in our hospitals is getting worse: hundreds of nurses and front-line hospital workers laid off; hospital beds closed. Rural communities are forced to fight just to keep the doors open and the lights on in their own local hospitals.

People want to know why this Premier is so determined to keep cutting hospital care.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I'm determined to do is to build up our health care system, to make sure that our health care system serves the people of this province with the right health care, in a timely way, where they need it.

We have to look at the whole health care system and hospitals are a very, very important part of that, which is why there's \$345 million more of new money in this year's budget for the hospital sector. But beyond that, there is \$1 billion more in new money that we're putting into health care, into the whole system.

Again, I know the member of the third party understands that the health care system is under transition. There's no doubt about that. It's changing. The way health care's been delivered is changing. There are community services available now that were not available in the past, and there's more of that which is necessary. So we have to look at the system as a whole.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: The Premier likes to deny that any hospital cuts are happening under her watch, but the Premier's fooling no one. Patients, families, front-line hospital workers and administrators, as well as local health coalitions, all see right through the Liberals' talking points.

St. Joseph's Health Care in London said they have seen almost \$36.5 million cut over the last four years under this Liberal government. All those cuts mean bed closures, longer wait times for patients and fewer front-line nurses and health care workers.

When services are cut in our hospitals, they get privatized in the community. They are not available. They are not accessible. They have no oversight. It begs the question: Why is this Premier putting hospitals in the

terrible position of making decisions based on dollars and deficits, rather than what's best for patients and their families?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Actually, I guess I would say back to the member of the third party, why is she not talking about the whole health care system? Why is she not talking about the way health care delivery is changing? She is a health care provider. I would think she would understand that people who are in the community, who need care, want that care in their homes. They want it through community delivery services as opposed to putting all of that onus on the hospital.

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think, given the heckling that's coming from the third party right now, they actually recognize—

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: Don't get sick. You'll see it for yourself.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You can hide, but I can still catch you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact that since 2003 there are 5,600 more doctors in the system—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: How about seniors and drugs? Another climb down.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We have paramedics who are in the Legislature today. I think they recognize that there are changes happening in the system that are necessary in order for us to deliver 21st-century health care.

ONTARIO TRAILS

Mr. Han Dong: My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Over the past few weeks, we have seen Bill 100, the Supporting Ontario's Trails Act, repeatedly criticized by the opposition parties based on misconceptions related to the trail easements. Numerous times, the minister has said that an easement pursuant to Bill 100, if passed, will be a voluntary agreement between a landlord and an eligible body or bodies.

Mr. Don McCabe, the OFA president, has said that Bill 100 does not encroach on the freedom of individual landowners.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he tell this House more about the trail easements?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina for the question. Trail easements under Bill 100 are voluntary and will not alter existing land use agreements. It surprises me that many of the members opposite have gone on record saying that this is actually a threat to trails here in the province of Ontario, but yet our stakeholders have repeatedly told this government that Bill 100 is a wonderful bill.

The Niagara Escarpment Commission and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters have said that they are

fully supportive of this bill. Bruce Trail has told us that trail easements are a very useful tool that will cut years of bureaucratic red tape.

This is just another example, Mr. Speaker, of the Progressive Conservatives being out of touch with the people of Ontario. I hope the opposition will get onside to support—

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: That's all you're doing is fuelling the flames. It's true.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don't waste it.

Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: I want to thank the minister for clarifying this issue.

I cannot stress enough how important Bill 100 is to Ontario. Trail tourism contributes \$1.4 billion to our economy each year. That number includes over \$800 million in labour income, which supports an estimated 18,000 jobs across the province.

Bill 100 is intended to grow the trails sector by connecting and expanding trails across the province, increasing the economic benefits for local communities such as mine in Trinity-Spadina.

There have been questions on whether we did enough consultations on Bill 100. Could the minister tell the members of this House how we consulted on Bill 100?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Again, I want to thank the member for Trinity-Spadina for the question. I know he's a huge supporter of trails here in the province of Ontario. In fact, the Bill Davis trail recently opened up in Trinity-Spadina.

To develop Bill 100, our ministry held broad, in-person consultations right across the entire province. We engaged with groups like the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance, Simcoe County Trails, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs, the Bruce Trail Conservancy, the Ontario Native Women's Association, and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. We consulted with 80 municipalities, with indigenous groups, with landowners and with trail organizations from all across Ontario. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we consulted with over 250 different groups here in Ontario. I think our government has done an excellent job—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, second time.

New question.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Yesterday, Ontario Gaming East announced it would be relocating the slots at Kawartha Downs in my riding to Peterborough and building a new casino. The township of Cavan Monaghan will lose \$3 million in annual slot revenues to fix roads and bridges, which will only continue to strain the small budget of my municipality. This government loves to talk about infrastructure, yet now that my township is faced

with losing significant slot revenues, this government won't bat an eye.

Speaker, will the minister tell my municipality where they are supposed to find the \$3 million that his government has now ripped out of their budget?

1130

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for her question this morning, but let me give the member a little history—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener-Waterloo will come to order.

Minister?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Let me give the member a little history.

I remember when I was a city councillor in Peterborough in 1997-98, we had started talks about annexation with that municipality to offer financial support as that process moved forward. While I'm not a member of city council today, I understand, in conversations with the mayor of Peterborough, Daryl Bennett, that there have been ongoing talks with that municipality regarding annexation proposals. Even though I'm not privy to discussions, I'm told that the city of Peterborough has made very generous offers to that municipality for their future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Wow. I don't know what discussions have been going on, but my discussion is that the OLG and the government have repeatedly said that they were committed to the longer-term sustainability of the horse racing industry. Kawartha Downs had 100 races. It now has 18, but the loss of slots is going to ultimately close Kawartha Downs, and horse racing will be gone.

In 2013, that very minister said that he had planned to maintain a share of slot revenues to support the horse racing industry. Yesterday's announcement shows the minister has no plan. Mr. Speaker, were the bright lights and allure of a shiny new casino in his riding just too hard for the minister to resist?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, if the member—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Jeff Leal: The member should do her homework. She should sit down with municipal representatives of Cavan Monaghan to find out the generous offer that the city of Peterborough put on the table for that municipality to sustain their finances for the future to come.

When it comes to horse racing, the only time that member ever showed up at Kawartha Downs was when they thought they were going to close it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That one actually hurt my ear.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It hurt yours, too? Just saying.

The minister has one sentence.

Hon. Jeff Leal: The fact of the matter is John Snobelen, Elmer Buchanan and John Wilkinson put forward a path for sustainable horse racing in the province of Ontario. It was never supported by—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Today, I'm asking the Premier to do the math. I'm asking her to estimate the minimum monthly income needed for a single person to live a healthy, dignified life in our province.

In her estimation, what is the bare minimum needed to afford basics like nutritious food, safe and decent housing, and clothing; to have access to transportation, a telephone? What does it cost for a single person to live in places like Timmins or Hamilton or Attawapiskat, or right in her own riding of Don Valley West? How much does the Premier imagine this costs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much to the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek for his interest in social assistance. I really welcome this, and of course, we will be debating his private member's bill tomorrow. I look forward to having 50 minutes in this House to talk about the most vulnerable in our society.

As the member has referenced, rates are extremely important. This is why we have been increasing rates consistently over the last number of years.

In this year's budget, we really did take the unprecedented step of saying that there would no longer be a clawback of child support payments.

We intend to take a very comprehensive look at social assistance reform. In a way—it's the whole of government way of looking at how we can support our most vulnerable people. We will be looking at employment incentives, training—a number of different areas.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: With all due respect, unfortunately it's no surprise that the Premier can't give me an estimate. This government simply does not understand the daily challenges faced by people trying to pay the bills in Ontario. It's time to do the math.

During this government's time in office, the poorest people in Ontario have got poorer. Food banks are overflowing. People on social assistance programs—including people with chronic disabilities, unable to participate in the labour market—have less real income today than they had under Mike Harris.

New Democrats believe that governments must make evidence-based public policy. We believe that we need social assistance benefits that actually reflect the real

costs of living. Will the Premier take the politics out of social assistance? Will the Premier commit to ensuring social assistance policy is based in evidence?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: It is really refreshing to hear from the new New Democratic Party their interest in these important matters. I seem to recall that the 2014 election platform—you will recall the nine pages—never once mentioned the most vulnerable in our society. We never saw any support for our increasing of the minimum wage. We haven't seen support for the Ontario Child Benefit—in all the aspects that we have taken, all the initiatives that we've taken to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in our society.

Again, the way we are going to address this very important issue is that we're going to look across the spectrum of supports for people on social assistance. In fact, in this budget, we also saw free tuition for post-secondary training. This is going to help the most vulnerable in our society. We're going to look at health benefits; we're going to look at housing. We have some very important initiatives that this government has introduced, and we will continue in this way.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, come to order.

New question.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Education. In looking around this place today, we all recognize the International Day of Pink, a day where we recognize the anti-bullying initiative that began in Nova Scotia after a grade 9 student was bullied in his school for wearing pink. Two students who witnessed the incident bought pink shirts to stand united with the student against bullying.

Now, many schools run events on the Day of Pink, including in my riding of Cambridge and Waterloo region. When my son Liam was co-president of Southwood Secondary School, he and his friends had their fingernails painted pink, as well as their faces, as a challenge, and he organized events, including a play about the effects of bullying, for the students.

It's important that we continue to stand together and create awareness, not only today but every day. Can the minister tell this House how we ensure that our students feel safe and respected at schools across our province?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Well, thank you to the member. I'm just going to have to go to Southwood and check out all these pink faces and fingernails. It sounds like fun.

Our schools must be places where everyone—staff, students, parents and the community—feel welcome, safe and respected. That's why I'm proud of the Accepting Schools Act. This act is Canada's most comprehensive

anti-bullying legislation, and as part of its definition of bullying, it also includes cyberbullying.

School safety has been a priority for this government from the beginning, and that's why we require all school boards to have policies on bullying prevention and intervention. Our government has invested \$425 million in safe schools initiatives that are helping make Ontario's schools safer. In fact, this year—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I thank the minister for her commitment on this important issue. We're extremely proud of the investments made towards educating not only our students, but parents and staff. For the first time ever, we have defined bullying in legislation so that every student, teacher, principal and parent knows what we're talking about when we say that bullying is not okay in our schools.

Minister, in 2015, you introduced the revised health and physical education curriculum to better reflect the advancement of technology in making information readily available to students. I've had many of my constituents in Cambridge speak positively about this new curriculum, noting that the previous curriculum was written well before the use of cellphones and the Internet was prevalent around students. In fact, my oldest two children didn't have cellphones until they reached university.

Speaker, through you, can the minister tell us about the benefits of the revised curriculum and how it's helping our students navigate in today's technology-driven world?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The reality is that we want our children to be safe and healthy, but we also want to ensure that they have access to accurate information. We needed to update our health and phys-ed curriculum so that students understand the importance of healthy relationships, having the confidence to say no, safe use of technology and the Internet, and mental health.

The revised curriculum offers increased support, acceptance and visibility for LGBTQ and two-spirit children and youth.

We're also working to ensure that our students have the opportunity to learn more about online safety through the revised curriculum. Students are learning about safe and respectful use of technology, the social, emotional and legal implications of online behaviour such as—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE CONTROL

Mr. Toby Barrett: To the Premier: 10 months ago, all parties in this House supported a private member's bill, the Provincial Framework and Action Plan concerning Emerging Vector-Borne Diseases Act. I thank everyone for that support. Part of the legislation was a requirement to develop a provincial framework and to develop the action plan within a year.

Lyme tick season is now upon us. Will the Premier now please report to the House, and to the victims of this awful affliction, the progress to date, what's being done?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I will say I don't have the information on what has happened so far. I know that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care will want to speak to him when he returns. He is, as you know, in Attawapiskat today with the Minister of Children and Youth Services and will certainly get back to the member opposite with an update.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton Mountain on a point of order.

Miss Monique Taylor: I missed introductions earlier, and I see a dear friend up in the top. I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park today, with OPSEU, Lorraine Stitch.

DEFERRED VOTES

JOBS FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW ACT (BUDGET MEASURES), 2016

LOI DE 2016 FAVORISANT LA CRÉATION D'EMPLOIS POUR AUJOURD'HUI ET DEMAIN (MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statutes / Projet de loi 173, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter ou à modifier diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1143 to 1148.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville
Baker, Yvan
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad

Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fraser, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoggarth, Ann
Hunter, Mitzi
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwintar, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted

Meilleur, Madeleine
Milczyn, Peter Z.
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Oraziatti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Vernile, Daiene
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Brown, Patrick
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
DiNovo, Cheri
Fedeli, Victor
Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne
Gélinas, France

Gretzky, Lisa
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hatfield, Percy
Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Hudak, Tim
Jones, Sylvia
MacLaren, Jack
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia

Natyshak, Taras
Nicholls, Rick
Pettapiece, Randy
Sattler, Peggy
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Thompson, Lisa M.
Vanthof, John
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 54; the nays are 44.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1152 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I want to welcome again the representatives of the Eye Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario here today. They will be around this afternoon with meetings with everyone, and I hope they take the opportunity and have a good discussion with them.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEMOPHILIA

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to stand today in the Legislature before World Hemophilia Day, which will be celebrated on April 17 this year.

Hemophilia is a genetic bleeding disorder which impairs the body's ability to properly clot. Unfortunately, one in 1,000 people have a bleeding disorder like hemophilia, but many go undiagnosed and never receive the treatment they require.

It's estimated that 75% of those suffering from hemophilia around the world are still receiving inadequate access or no access at all to proper treatment. There is no cure for hemophilia, although it can be controlled through regular treatments, such as infusions of the deficient clotting factor, which is a lifelong process and highly costly.

The World Federation of Hemophilia is a not-for-profit organization and has been a tireless advocate for over 50 years for bleeding disorders. The training and education they provide to people regarding proper diagnosis and management for those who suffer from hemophilia is crucial in the fight against this delicate disease.

I just want to take a moment and recognize John Plater. John Plater was a friend of mine in university. I used to go to the movies with him Tuesday nights. He passed away four years ago. He had hemophilia and was affected by the tainted blood scandal this country went through, but he played a key role in ensuring that those were looked after. He was a strong fighter for human rights, and I don't think we could celebrate World Hemophilia Day without mentioning heroes like John Plater in this Legislature.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Paul Miller: I was joined in the media studio this morning by anti-poverty advocates from Hamilton and Toronto. They discussed the gross inadequacy of social assistance rates in Ontario, the effects of this deep poverty trap on children, families and single people, and the path forward proposed in my Bill 185 that would tie social assistance rates to the actual cost of living in different Ontario municipalities.

Ontario's desperately low social assistance rates have left families hungry, underhoused and sick. It's heart-breaking to hear the real effects of our inadequate safety net on the lives of real Ontarians. Over 900,000 people in the province rely on Ontario Works or ODSP, but more than half of these families do not even have enough to eat.

The continuing existence of deep poverty in this province is a scandal. We see dire poverty and all its terrible effects in many First Nations and remote northern communities, as we're going through right now. We see it in our greatest cities, and we see it throughout rural Ontario.

Social policy-making should be based on evidence and research. My Bill 185 will provide the government and the public with hard evidence and research on the cost of living in different Ontario communities each year and recommend benefit rates that meet people's basic needs. The bill is a real change, a step forward in ending dire poverty in Ontario. I hope that all members will support it.

Speaker, I must say I was a little disappointed this morning to hear some of the comments from the minister in reference to the activity of the NDP in these matters. I can remember the days of grandmothers when that party cut off grandmothers from support.

VAISAKHI

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: April 13 is a day of great significance for Sikhs as on this occasion Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th guru of the Sikhs, laid down the foundation of Khalsa, the Order of the Pure Ones.

On this day in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh summoned Sikhs from all over India to the city of Anandpur Sahib. At this gathering, the guru called upon Sikhs to uphold their faith and preserve the Sikh religion. In this ceremony, Guru Gobind Singh made five Sikhs the Panj Pyare, or the Five Beloved Ones.

It was following this ceremony that Guru Gobind Singh created the order of the Khalsa, or soldier saints. In a move to end social subdivisions, Guru Gobind Singh asked the Panj Pyare to drop their surnames that linked them to caste or occupation, and gave them new names. The women were called Kaur, meaning "princess," to emphasize dignity, and men were called Singh, which means "lion," a reminder of the need for courage.

The Guru created five articles of faith which all Khalsa were required to wear, all beginning with the letter K. Each of these articles of faith is rooted in Sikh philosophy.

The turban is also a central tenet of Sikh faith. The turban represents the Sikh's commitment to service to others and to uphold equal rights for all, with accountability only to God.

Vaisakhi is also a Punjabi harvest festival. This day is also observed as a thanksgiving day by farmers to pay tribute, thanking God for the abundant harvest and also praying for future prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, over 600,000 Sikhs live in Canada. The festival of Vaisakhi has a tremendous religious significance for over 350,000 Sikhs who reside in Ontario. Every year, Ontario Sikhs take great pride in decorating gurdwaras and organizing Nagar Kirtans. This year, the Nagar Kirtan will be held in Toronto on April 24 and in Mississauga on May 1. I want to extend an invitation to all my colleagues to attend these functions.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Communities in my riding are expressing concern about volatility and sudden price changes in gasoline experienced at times in northern Ontario. The city of North Bay and the municipality of Powassan both recently passed resolutions regarding this concern. They note that five provinces—PEI, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Quebec—now utilize a form of gas price regulation, with a system that sets a maximum price and a scheduled change where customers know what they're paying week to week, with province-wide price ranges in place.

The city of North Bay also points out that drivers in northern Ontario often see wide ranges in gasoline prices compared to other areas, particularly in southern Ontario. As a result, North Bay and Powassan councils both resolved to "request the provincial government to investigate benefits of such regulation for Ontario."

Speaker, the fact that these resolutions come at a time that gas prices are much lower than they have been in the recent past I believe reinforces the level of concern being expressed here, and the government should take that concern seriously.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today to congratulate Ahmad Moussaoui and the Canadian Federation of Students on their change.org petition, which has generated signatures from 60,000 Ontario students in less than one month.

The campaign was organized in response to the changes to student aid announced in this year's budget, which will reduce tuition fees for many low-income students beginning in 2017 but will do nothing to address the crushing debt burden carried by current students and recent graduates.

For more than a decade, Ontario students have been paying higher tuition fees than in any other province. With students forced to rely on loans to finance their education, many are graduating with debt loads of \$27,000 or more.

At the same time, interest on student loans charged by the Ontario government means that many graduates pay as much in interest as to pay down their principal—in a labour market that offers little or no job security, or offers unpaid internships that earn nothing at all. The prospect of years of debt prevents these graduates from even thinking about the normal milestones of adult life, like buying a house or a car, getting married or starting a family.

Speaker, interest on student loans is effectively a poor tax. It disadvantages those from the lowest-income families, who carry the largest loans. I urge this government to listen to the 60,000 students who have signed the petition and provide debt relief and eliminate interest repayment from student loans.

EAST YORK SKATING CLUB

Mr. Arthur Potts: Today it is my pleasure to rise in the House and congratulate East York Skating Club on the 65th anniversary of their ice show. The theme of this year's program is Musical Tribute: Decades of Music, celebrating music from the 1950s to today.

Since 1949, the East York Skating Club has been an important part of the Beaches–East York community. Thousands of skaters have trained and started their careers here, including many who have gone on to compete at national and international levels. Kimberly Aherne, who is my legislative assistant, is but one of their many talented athletes, and she can still execute a double Salchow.

1510

A big part of the Ice Show's success and popularity is that it allows all skaters who regularly participate in the club's year-round programming to perform. The East York Skating Club is a not-for-profit and is renowned for its community involvement. A large group of coaches, parents and volunteers spend countless hours ensuring that the performance numbers are polished, the costumes are resplendent and that every small detail is managed.

The show is a true community effort. It's the highlight of the season, not just for the skaters but for the families

and friends who support them and the hundreds of skating fans who come out to see the show.

The 65th annual Ice Show takes place next weekend at the East York Memorial Arena, with three shows scheduled for Friday and Saturday. I personally will be attending opening night, and my family and I are looking forward to celebrating these skaters and their performances and to thanking all the coaches and volunteers who make this event so very, very special.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I can still do one too.

The member from Dufferin–Caledon.

BOOST CHILD AND YOUTH
ADVOCACY CENTRE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today to highlight the work taking place at Boost Child and Youth Advocacy Centre in Toronto. The child and youth advocacy centre is a partnership between eight local community and government agencies, including the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Catholic Children's Aid Society, Native Child and Family Services, Jewish Family and Child Service, Toronto Police Service, Radius Child and Youth Services, the Child Development Institute and the Hospital for Sick Children.

This effort brings together all professionals involved in child abuse cases under one roof for a coordinated, seamless, multidisciplinary approach to protecting children across Toronto.

Boost became the first ever child and youth advocacy centre in all of Toronto in 2013. Since then, they have become the largest centre of its kind in all of Canada.

In 2014-15, Boost Child and Youth Advocacy Centre conducted 800 investigations and served 325 children and youth as well as 259 parents and caregivers. This is a model that works and has proven to help our province's children and youth.

I urge this government to allow other communities across the province to replicate this successful model. I want to thank Boost for the great work they are doing in helping the lives of our province's children and youth.

WORLD LEBANESE CULTURAL UNION

Mr. John Fraser: Last Saturday I had the pleasure of joining Premier Kathleen Wynne and my colleague from Mississauga–Brampton South, Amrit Mangat, at the World Lebanese Cultural Union World Congress Gala.

In my riding of Ottawa South, I'm fortunate to represent many families of Lebanese descent, and on Saturday night I was pleased to see so many familiar faces from Ottawa at the gala.

The World Lebanese Cultural Union is a non-political, non-religious organization dedicated to building cultural and economic bridges between Lebanon and the many countries that millions of Lebanese people now call home.

The gala brought together people from across the country to honour three members of their community for their contribution to Canadian society and the Lebanese community: The first was entrepreneur and Honorary Consul of Lebanon Mr. Wadih Fares from Halifax, president of W.M. Fares Group; entrepreneur Mr. Jamil Cheaib from Quebec, president of Marché Adonis; and lastly, entrepreneur Mr. Mohamad Fakih, president of Paramount Fine Foods right here in Ontario.

It was an honour to be there.

2016 EQUITY CONFERENCE

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: On April 2, I attended the 2016 Equity Conference, hosted by the Dufferin–Peel Catholic school board at St. Francis Xavier high school in my great riding of Mississauga–Brampton South.

Sometimes we forget that for all the diversity in Peel region, there are some very simple inequalities which our society must challenge, such as gender inequality or the stigma that surrounds mental health, which affects us all.

The keynote speaker at the conference was Margaret Trudeau, who herself experienced society's harsh, even unjust, attitude towards mental illness.

I want to thank the school board for hosting this wonderful conference and for raising the issue of equity in race, socio-economics and personal ability, as well as mental health. Mr. Speaker, it was inspiring to see so many teachers and staff attend this important event.

And of course I want to thank Michelle Coutinho, the principal of equity, diversity and inclusive education with the board, for organizing the event. Congratulations, Michelle, on your highly successful event.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Your committee recommends that Bill Pr38, An Act respecting the Corporation of the Municipality of Huron Shores and the Thessalon First Nation, be not reported.

Your committee begs to report the following bills without amendment:

Bill Pr39, An Act respecting The Corporation of Massey Hall and Roy Thomson Hall;

Bill Pr40, An Act to revive 828117 Ontario Limited;

Bill Pr41, An Act to revive Bud Monahan Guitar Sales & Service Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

Report adopted.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I am pleased to sign my name to this petition and give it to page Aarbhi.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario entitled "Hydro One Not for Sale!" It reads:

"Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

"Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

"Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don't have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

"Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario's Hydro One."

I fully support this petition, affix my name to it and will give it to page Amelia to take to the table.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Todd Smith: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special

education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

"Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I agree with this and will sign it and send it to the table with page Madeline.

1520

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is my privilege to bring this petition to the Legislature on behalf of probation and parole officers across Ontario.

"Supporting the Inclusion of Probation and Probation and Parole Officers in Presumptive PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) Legislation under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 163 provides for WSIB benefits for a select few first responders diagnosed with PTSD; and

"Whereas MCSCS probation and parole officers and MCYS probation officers have been specifically excluded from Bill 163, despite overwhelming evidence that these front-line officers are exposed to primary trauma, secondary trauma and vicarious trauma often resulting in PTSD diagnoses; and

"Whereas the rates of assaults, threats and intimidation of corrections staff have increased by 2,750% in the period from 2009 to 2014; and

"Whereas Manitoba's Bill 35 'Workers Compensation Amendment Act' includes probation and probation and parole officers; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services has neither programs for the prevention of PTSD nor employee assistance programs (EAP) nor wellness programs that specifically support and treat those workers diagnosed with PTSD or like symptoms;

"We, the undersigned probation officers and probation and parole officers, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario shall include probation officers and probation and parole officers in presumptive PTSD legislation under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act and that the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services creates

programs aimed at PTSD prevention, along with employee assistance programs and wellness programs that address the mental health needs and occupational stressors related to trauma exposure."

I wholeheartedly support this petition, sign my name to it and send it with page Christina.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

"Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I'm happy to fix my name and give it to page Vanessa.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition entitled "Don't Balance the Budget on the Backs of Children with ASD." It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government recently announced plans to reform the way autism services are delivered in the province, which leaves children over the age of five with no access to intensive behavioural intervention (IBI); and

"Whereas in 2003, former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty removed the previous age cap on IBI therapy, stating that Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six; and

"Whereas applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and" IBI "are the only recognized evidence-based practices known to treat autism spectrum disorder (ASD); and

"Whereas the combined number of children waiting for ABA and IBI therapies in Ontario is approximately 16,158; and

"Whereas wait-lists for services have become overwhelmingly long due to the chronic underfunding by this Liberal government;

"Whereas some families are being forced to re-mortgage houses or move to other provinces while other families have no option but to go without essential therapy; and

"Whereas the Premier and her government should not be balancing the budget on the backs of kids with ASD and their families;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the government of Ontario to immediately ensure that all children currently on the waiting list for IBI therapy are grandfathered into the new program so they do not become a lost generation."

I fully support this petition, affix my name to it and will give it to page Christina to take to the table.

PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas personal support workers are the largest group of unregulated health care workers in Canada; and

"Whereas PSWs take care of society's most vulnerable citizens including seniors in long-term care, home care, hospitals and retirement homes, and adults with disabilities in supportive housing; and

"Whereas there is an increasing demand for PSWs and they are a key component of a sustainable health care system; and

"Whereas PSWs do not have a set scope of practice, standards of practice or curriculum; and

"Whereas PSWs are left to perform one of the most important jobs in health care without the proper tools;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To designate personal support workers as a regulated health profession and enact according legislation."

I agree with this and will pass it off to Sabrina.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France G  linas: I have thousands of names on this petition that was brought to me by Dr. Albert Ng. He is from the board of directors of OMA District 1. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together

through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Vanessa to bring it to the Clerk.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas many parents and caregivers are being charged non-refundable fees to place their children on wait-lists for daycare centres;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees can range from tens to hundreds of dollars;

"Whereas due to the scarcity of quality daycare spaces, many parents and caregivers are forced to place their children on multiple wait-lists;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care;

"Whereas daycare wait-lists are often administered in a non-transparent manner which creates the risk that they will be administered in an unfair and/or discriminatory manner;

"Whereas parents and caregivers in Ontario already face significant barriers accessing daycare due to high costs and limited numbers of daycare spaces;

"Whereas quality child care is a public good and not a commodity and the costs of child care should not operate on a supply-and-demand basis....

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that we have a responsibility to take action now, and support a requirement for transparent administration of daycare wait-lists and a ban on non-refundable daycare wait-list fees."

I agree with this petition. I'm going to affix my signature on it and hand it to Aarbi.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ministry of Health has implemented a number of health care services cuts that impact patient care; and

"Whereas as a direct result of ministry cuts, the laboratory at the Highlands Health Network is closed as of January 1, 2016, this will drastically reduce services, affecting many patients who rely on the in-house laboratory for essential tests; and

"Whereas patient care is affected by the government's cuts including: \$54 million of the federal Canada Health Transfer from Ontario's health care budget, \$815 million from physician services, \$50 million from physiotherapy

services for seniors and 50 medical residency positions across the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Ministry of Health as follows:

"Restore funding to the physicians, so that the Highlands Health Network can continue providing laboratory services for all its patients."

I support the petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Diluk to take to the table.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition, and I want to thank Mr. Vince Wright from Hanmer, in my riding. It reads as follows:

"Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice....

"Whereas once you privatize Hydro One, there's no return; and

"Whereas we'll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

"Whereas we'll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

"Whereas we'll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what's happened elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come."

I fully support this petition and will ask Maya to bring it to the Clerk.

1530

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs; and

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas the freezing of student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind;

"Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I agree with this and pass it off to page Joshua.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I support this petition, affix my name to it and will give it to page Amelia to take to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is shuffling.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, just bear with me for a moment. I wasn't ready for your call here.

I want to tell the great folks in Peterborough riding that we will be doing government order G181. I know that this will be a very popular debate today.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 12, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The last time this was debated, the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton had the floor. I don't see him, so: further debate?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very pleased to rise today to begin the debate this afternoon on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I'm going to be sharing my time with the member for Ottawa-Orléans and the member for Newmarket-Aurora, ending with the member for Halton.

I am looking forward to having this opportunity to share with you, Mr. Speaker, and the House how exactly

this bill is being viewed in my community of Kitchener Centre. I've reached out to my local municipal leaders for their feedback because they're the ones that are going to have to work with the proposals that we're bringing forward.

The overarching goal, of course, is to ensure that our democratic process is fair and efficient concerning local elections, all the while keeping up with modern perspectives. I would say that Bill 181 does exactly that.

The proposed changes will provide clear rules that will govern how municipal leaders are elected while reflecting how to run a modern campaign and election. With each municipal election, the ministry does review the Municipal Elections Act. This is how we ensure that the needs of Ontario communities are being met during the election process. These reviews are done with extensive consultations. I can tell you that we received over 3,400 submissions, and they came in from the public, from municipal councils and from their staff. So we are listening to the needs of Ontario communities.

In my riding of Kitchener Centre, the impact of these consultations is very evident. I contacted and heard from my mayor, Berry Vrbanovic. He is very happy that our government listened to municipalities, and he's especially happy to see the shortened election period—we're going to be moving from January 1 to May 1.

Many of us who ran in the provincial election that ran for five to six weeks in 2014 would agree that it can be mentally and physically exhausting. Imagine what our local politicians who run for six months must go through. At my level in Kitchener, they're very happy to see the shortened period. Ken Seiling, the Chair of Waterloo region, told me that he also believes the shortened election period is a great idea, and he fully supports this proposal.

This is a very positive process of this government. We listened and we consulted, as we've always done. These consultations led to many other elements in this bill that I believe are important to talk about in some detail. Another issue mentioned by Kitchener mayor Vrbanovic is that the low voter turnout at local elections has him concerned. This was echoed throughout the consultation process, and looking at ways to try to reverse this trend is important. We are providing municipalities with the option of introducing ranked ballot voting in their communities. By giving councils this option, they can facilitate public input and open meetings. This method is favoured by our regional Chair, Ken Seiling. It's going to allow municipalities to determine the best possible course of action for their own communities. We know that many jurisdictions have already adopted ranked ballots, and they have seen better engagement, better debates and a higher voter turnout. This directly addresses the issue brought before us through consultation.

We're also proposing changes to campaign financing, ensuring that the rules are clear, simple to follow and easier to enforce. This increases transparency and accountability at the local level. To ensure better transparency, the bill proposes to regulate third-party ad-

vertisers for greater accountability. This includes setting contribution and spending limits. Any discussion regarding modern elections must also include a discussion of whether to ban corporate and union donations. These changes do provide municipalities with a choice—again, we're giving them a choice—to allow this to occur or not occur. It is up to them to make the best decisions for their communities.

Clerks are also going to be required to make public a report of which candidates filed financial statements and which ones did not. This again serves to increase accountability.

As of right now, Ontario has the longest-running nomination period of any province. This is shown to contribute to campaign fatigue among candidates and voters—I mentioned earlier that the length of the campaign is perhaps the reason why people are disengaged. By shortening the period that candidates can run for election, we're also listening to the feedback we're getting from municipalities and cutting down on campaign fatigue.

We're also seeking to help make elections more accessible by requiring accessibility plans prepared before the election and made public before voting day. This is going to help people who want to get to polling stations but may have some difficulty because of physical disabilities.

Finally, we're proposing improvements to the voters list, making it easier for voters to add and edit their information.

Bill 181 improves our municipal electoral process. This is supported by municipalities, because we listened to their needs. I heard some members of the opposition objecting to this. I want you to know that I contacted my local municipal leaders, and they support this bill; they're behind it.

I hope that all my fellow members here are going to join me and help to bring the Municipal Elections Act into the modern age with this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Ottawa—Orléans.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Like the other members in this House, it's a pleasure to rise and bring my voice to this debate today.

All of us in this House agree that democracy best serves the people when we engage Ontarians, give individuals a greater voice in choosing their municipal politicians and, importantly, reduce barriers, whether physical or not. We've heard many things about what this bill will contribute. But as someone who is passionate about disability and the progress we've made through the AODA, I'm extremely pleased to see that we will be looking at reducing barriers for those with disabilities.

When I was engaging many communities last year, on the 10th anniversary of the AODA, I heard of the good work we've done but the journey we must continue. This is why I'm extremely pleased that this act specifies that city clerks would prepare accessibility plans to identify and remove barriers that could affect both voters and

candidates with disabilities. This plan would also be available to the public before the election. So I am extremely glad that we are continuing to look at how to engage those with disabilities and make it easier for them to exercise their right.

1540

Speaker, as a member who had one of the highest voter turnouts in the last election, I am hopeful that the tools this bill gives to municipalities will encourage voter turnout at the municipal level. This voter turnout is affected by many factors, and this bill, if passed, will give the tools to municipalities to encourage and support voters and candidates.

As part of the consultation following the 2014 municipal election, PA Rinaldi came to Ottawa, and I had the pleasure of sitting in on this meeting. I heard from candidates, both successful and not successful, on the unnecessarily long length of the writ period. This was one of their major concerns, and I am happy to say we've heard this concern and are taking action. Entering a potentially 10-month-long contest is a daunting task and potentially could sway many people to not enter the race at all.

Also, from a female politician, I feel this long writ period is an impediment for females seeking a seat on council or running for mayor. I do hope that this bill will lead to more women entering the political area because while we have strong female mayors, many of whom I had the pleasure of meeting at AMO and OGRA/ROMA each year, the councillors themselves are heavily male. In fact, I have to say that of the 23 city of Ottawa councillors, there are only four women.

This act, if passed, will help our municipalities also conduct efficient elections. I have to say—and I'm going to give a plug to my councillors—I work with three great councillors: Bob Monette, Jody Mitic and Stephen Blais. While we don't always agree on who provides the most services to citizens, I do agree that they do fantastic work. This bill will help my councillors continue to do their great work. I hope that they're watching right now, and I'll say, "You're welcome, guys."

We are allowing municipalities, if they so choose, to introduce the ranked ballot system. We are allowing our municipalities to decide how to conduct their electoral business, and we're giving them a new tool to ensure that they can better engage their citizens.

In any democracy, the success of elections depends on voters and candidate engagement, so we hope that these increase through the actions we are taking and by the tools we are allowing municipalities to use, if they so choose.

I just want to finish by stating that these changes here are needed to help strengthen our democracy. If one more voter votes, or a candidate—and I have to give my plug—especially a female candidate, runs, then this bill has served a tremendous purpose for the continuation of our strong democratic system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Boy, the government is asleep at the switch today.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I am delighted to stand and talk about Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. It holds near to my heart a number of the key things that, as a municipal councillor, I saw up close and personal in my days around council table, and for many years before that, in my involvement with municipal politics across Ontario.

I just wanted to reiterate from the beginning that the government is proposing to change the Municipal Elections Act in an aim to ensure that the rules of governing how municipal leaders are elected are clear and reflect how to run modern campaigns and elections. The ministry reviews the Municipal Elections Act following each municipal election to ensure that the act meets the changing needs of Ontario's communities. We've heard for many years, especially in my neck of the woods, that that time had come.

Relevant to that is the fact that the government received some 3,400 submissions on how the act can be improved, by the public and by municipal councils and staff from across the province, as part of the consultations that dated back to 2015.

It goes without saying that municipalities provide important front-line services. They're the level of government that is closest to people. I can attest to that, being a town councillor. I got the phone calls about potholes. I got the phone calls about sports facilities. I also got phone calls about wild turkeys, but that's a whole other issue; I was glad to come here and deal with MNR. I have nothing to do with wild turkeys as a town councillor. We get all the calls because so many people really don't see the difference between the levels of government.

It's vital to make sure that people have faith in their municipal governments. They account for a significant amount of our tax dollars, and people need to be assured that they're transparent and accountable. Allowing more choice in municipal elections is part of the government's plan to build Ontario up.

I'll say that I've had the pleasure of being able to talk to municipal councillors from both of the communities that I represent here at Queen's Park: Newmarket and Aurora. They're similar communities, but still different and apart.

For example, in Aurora, we don't have a ward system; we have first-past-the-post. We have a very vibrant democracy that takes place there every election year. I think, in our previous election, we had 28 people running for eight spots, which made for some very interesting all-candidates debates. I think there were three or four or five people running for mayor. You had to book the better part of an afternoon and an evening, if you were going to an all-candidates debate, by the time people stood up. But I thought it was the hallmark of a good democracy when you got that number of people interested in what's going on.

In Newmarket, we have a ward system, so it's a little different. I think in Newmarket, they're not quite sure whether or not a ranked ballot is the way they want to go,

but certainly they're having a good look at it and there's some good discussion going on. And the same with Aurora; I think they're leaning towards the ranked ballot system.

This bill really has provided the impetus for that type of discussion that is so important.

Just for a quick review, ranked ballots—at a time when voter turnout is going down in many communities—and I can say that that's ours as well—it's really time to look at ideas that can reverse that trend. I think that Bill 181 is the right step in the right direction at the right time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise in the House today and speak to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

I also want to thank my colleagues who spoke to this bill before me—the member from Kitchener Centre, the member from Ottawa, and the member from Newmarket–Aurora—for their comments.

This legislation will change the way Ontarians participate in the municipal elections process. These proposed changes will improve our electoral process and ensure that Ontarians' voices are heard when it comes to grassroots municipal issues. This bill, proposed by my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, would make a series of important amendments that will change municipal campaigns for the better.

Our government received over 3,400 submissions from the public, municipal councils and staff about how the Municipal Elections Act could be improved, and we listened. This input was very important and has helped guide the changes that were laid out in Bill 181. People told us that they want these proposed changes. They want an increase in transparency and accountability, efficient elections and more choice to municipalities.

Bill 181 will allow for municipalities to introduce ranked ballot voting in their communities if they choose to do so. Those who are in favour of ranked ballots believe they will make campaigns more civil and can encourage public engagement, better debate and higher voter turnout. Those are important things. Ranked ballots will allow more Ontarians to be heard. At a time when voter turnout has decreased in many Ontario communities, it is important that we give municipalities this option. Our government must continue to look at new, innovative options to ensure that our electoral system, at all levels, is relevant to the public.

1550

Our world is changing and growing. Our rules must change and evolve as our communities do. So I applaud this amendment in Bill 181. I believe that leaving room for electoral change at the municipal level is a step in the right direction for all communities in Ontario.

In addition, the changes to the campaign finance rules that are proposed in this bill will ensure that they are clear, simple to follow and easier to enforce. These new

regulations will ultimately increase transparency and accountability in municipal elections.

By proposing a framework to regulate third-party advertising, this bill would increase accountability for advertisers and ensure more fair and transparent support for candidates. I used to work in the media and I can't stress enough just how important it is that the regulations on advertising be looked at closely during campaigns. Setting contribution and spending limits, as well as ensuring that third parties identify themselves on signs and advertisements, will make for a more reliable and clear electoral system. Voters need to know who is behind media campaigns and what their interests are.

These changes will benefit not only municipalities and Ontarians now but create a fairer system for future generations to come, and for our children. This is about making it easier and clearer for voters to cast their ballot and make choices for their municipalities, while making this process more transparent.

These amendments will also ensure that elections are more accessible for everyone. All Ontarians entitled to a vote must be able to cast their vote. This is a pillar of our democracy. Bill 181 proposes changes that would require clerks to prepare accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could affect voters and candidates with disabilities. We all know that a better Ontario is a more accessible Ontario, so I'm very pleased that this bill will ensure that this is a priority for municipalities.

The proposed amendments to the voters list will also ensure that it's easier for voters to add their names to the list, or if they need to make changes to their personal information. Things in life change: where we live, our contact information and even our names sometimes. The ability to more easily change this type of data will definitely be beneficial to all municipalities in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, the changes in Bill 181 are necessary to modernize the system and will bring the Municipal Elections Act up to date with our changing province. I hope that all members of this House will see the many benefits of this bill, because it's a piece of legislation that will make a difference and ensure democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It always astonishes me that there are no members on the opposite side who actually read any bills; they just take talking points. There are a couple of points in this bill that I'd like to bring to their attention, and maybe they'll address them in their comments, if they have read the bill.

First off, this bill allows for ranked ballots, but it doesn't specify what sort or what conditions of ranked ballots. Will it be the system where all boxes have to be ticked or the ballot would be spoiled, or will it be the ranked ballots that allow for only one individual to be chosen? I haven't heard that. It's not specified in the bill.

This bill also permits councils to have different balloting systems for different positions within the same election. The mayor's position could be first-past-the-

post; a ward councillor may be a ranked ballot. They could have multiple variations of a ranked ballot within different wards. Certainly, you can see that this would be unacceptable, at best—intolerable, really.

But, it also permits and allows a council to devise its own electoral system in advance of the election. A council could say, “I think we would be better off with a ranked ballot, or maybe we’d be better off with a first-past-the-post ballot, or some combination and variation of.” Elections are too important to allow the council of the day to make choices and variations of the election system.

I’d like to have a response from the members who have read the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I’m pleased to provide a couple of minutes of commentary on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

Certainly, my community, the municipality of London, is one of those municipalities in the province that is supportive of the ranked ballot. They passed a resolution in June to advise the province that they support municipalities having an option to use ranked balloting in the 2018 municipal election. There was a grassroots initiative that emerged prior to the last municipal election called 123London that has been working on this issue for years, actually, at this point. So this bill was greeted with some enthusiasm by people in my community and by progressives everywhere in the province who do see some of the benefits of ranked balloting.

However, the ranked ballot provisions are packaged in Bill 181 with a number of other initiatives that do raise concerns. In particular, we are very concerned about the third-party advertising provisions. The bill links the right to promote an issue to the right to make a campaign contribution. So if a municipality decides to ban corporate and union contributions, corporations, unions and civil society organizations within a community no longer have a right to freedom of expression; they have no right to raise concerns on issues during a campaign period. We are concerned that this bill could, in fact, stifle democracy rather than enhance democracy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It’s a great pleasure to rise in this House and talk about Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

Our government has listened to the public, and we have received over 3,400 letters and submissions from the members of the public basically requesting the government to modernize this act. That’s what we have been doing, and that’s what this debate is all about.

As we all know, municipalities are the front-line service providers to our towns, to our cities and to our communities, and the politicians who basically oversee these services in our communities need to be elected thoroughly. We need to excite the public to come out and participate in voting and in the democratic process. History

shows us that only about 25% or 30% of the members of the public come out and vote. So we need to encourage them to come out and vote in municipal elections. This is very essential to a healthy democracy, which we need to have in our municipalities, in our cities, towns and regions.

That’s why this bill introduces the ranked ballot process, which is very helpful. In some jurisdictions where they have this process, the results are much, much better than in the ones which do not have that process. Of course, it’s not an easy process; this is quite understandable. It has its own complications, but the end results will lead to a better democracy and better participation of the public in this democratic process.

Also, the bill asks for modernization of campaign finances. That’s also very important. We believe that, particularly in municipalities, the funding or donations by unions should be banned and donations by corporations should be banned. Basically, the people of that municipality have to participate in the financing of campaigns of those candidates who want to run.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: You know what? Whenever I mention municipal elections and modernizing, which is what this act is about, people talk to me about electronic voting, and nobody has really addressed that yet. I think that some cities, such as the city of Markham—part of my riding is in the city of Markham—have electronic voting, whereas the city of Vaughan doesn’t. That’s very unfortunate. A lot of people in the city of Vaughan don’t make it home on time to vote and don’t realize they can vote in advance or other ways.

In terms of ranked ballots, there’s been a lot of discussion of ranked ballots. As my colleague mentioned, there are a lot of different systems which aren’t being addressed here. As somebody who went through a recount, it concerns me a tiny bit how we would be able to manage recounts in a ranked ballot system. Obviously there is a lot of campaign fatigue. People want shorter campaigns, and there’s a lot of support for that.

I would just mention that in the riding of Thornhill, we used to have an MP and an MPP whose first names were both Peter, and a lot of times voters would get very confused about that and we would just say, “Of course, just vote for whichever Peter you want as long as their name is Peter.”

We aren’t really addressing the fact of the York region chair. I’m really disappointed about that because voters in York region want the chair position to be an elected position for the most part, and that bill is being stalled by the government. It’s a government bill, so I don’t really understand that. The member is here; maybe he can address that later when he has a couple of minutes. It is all about democracy. I think that electing the chair of York region would make York region more democratic.

Copies of voters lists make people very nervous when they hear that there are multiple circulations of voters

lists. Maybe that again could be modernized by having it only accessible online; then people are blocked off and they cannot possibly download it. Maybe that technology is getting there.

Thank you for allowing me to share my comments, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): One of the four speakers has two minutes.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I appreciate the comments from the members from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, London West, Richmond Hill and Thornhill—good speakers all.

I'm not going to rehash the debate we seem to continuously have about how modern legislators work vis-à-vis legislation versus regulation. So many of the details, I believe, will be worked out in regulation, as they are in other democracies around the world, so I'm not going to go there.

I will comment on the member from Thornhill and the private member's bill, because it's not a government bill. It was a private member's bill that spoke to the election of the chair of York region. From my perspective, that bill is still very active and slowly wending its way along. I agree and thank the member for her continued support.

I just wanted to touch on the issue, again, of ranked ballots, how important it is to engage the community and how this has been a phenomenal opportunity, with 3,400 submissions received from across Ontario—in my community of Newmarket-Aurora—and to have people talk about this and engage people in a positive way. People have been talking about the lack of enthusiasm in municipal politics for a number of years. When I was a town councillor, I would tell them to tune in to cable TV and watch our shows because they were anything but boring, as you can well imagine. It was amazing how many times we got people involved that way.

I also said—given there might be 28 people on a first-past-the-post ballot in Aurora—when asked, if your last name was Aardvark, you would win. That would certainly help.

But this is a great bill. I look forward to further discussion in our community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise today and to add to the debate on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

One of the key components of Bill 181 deals with the notion of ranked balloting. Specifically, the bill would give municipalities the right to implement a ranked ballot system without any consultation with the public, beginning with the 2018 election. I'm sure there are some viewers at home wondering, "What is a ranked ballot system and what does it actually mean?" Well, for those of you who actually thought of that question, thank you for asking that question because I'll tell you, from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing's website page on the matter, it says, "Ranked ballots allow a voter to rank candidates in order of preference—first choice,

second choice, third choice etc.—instead of just voting for one candidate."

The site goes on to clarify that the changes found within the bill would not impact how school board trustees are elected. It goes on to state, "Please note that ranked ballots are not being considered for school boards. If a municipality decided to use ranked ballots to elect council positions, voters would still use the current voting method to vote for school board trustee."

Barry Kay, a political science professor at Wilfrid Laurier University, said, "Parties that are seen to be more towards the centre, the Liberal Party in our federal system, probably would do somewhat better" under a ranked ballot system. Interesting. This may explain why this specific electoral system is the preferred method of choice for the Liberals compared to the number of potential options for electoral reform that are out there.

Which party would benefit the most from moving from first-past-the-post to ranked ballots? What about various models, about proportional representation or other electoral systems? That's why I believe that no individual party or person in power, be they Liberal or PC or NDP, should be able to make unilateral changes to the system under which they will be getting elected.

Speaker, I'd like to rewind the clock and go back in time. This was the year that Ontario faced a referendum question on electoral reform. That was back in 2007. What they did was, they were asking if the province should abandon its current first-past-the-post system in favour of a mixed-member proportional representation system, which thankfully has a short form of MMP.

Back then, the minister who introduced the bill publicly endorsed a transition to a mixed-member proportional—MMP—representation system, but is now in favour of ranked ballots. It's amazing what can happen in just maybe nine years. One wonders why the minister flip-flopped on this issue, as they are two radically different electoral systems. Did the minister fall out of love with the MMP system because it didn't help the Liberal Party as much?

At the time, the minister responsible for democratic renewal said, "Our democracy belongs to its citizens, and it is the voters of this province that should decide how their representatives should be elected."

Linda Jeffrey, who was a parliamentary assistant at that time, said the following back in 2007 in regard to potential electoral reform—

Mr. John Yakabuski: What did she say?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you for asking. She said this: "We believe a decision of this magnitude deserves to have the support of a solid majority of Ontarians across the province, and the proposed legislation reflects the significance of this decision."

Mr. John Yakabuski: She was right.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: We agree wholeheartedly. When it comes to changing electoral systems, regardless of which system we may move towards, I believe that the people should have some say. It should absolutely not be left up to those who are in power to stack the deck in

their favour. Even if the door is left open to the possibility of such actions, it should be closed by requiring the support of the people.

The Liberals required 60% of Ontarians to vote in favour of changing our electoral system back in 2007 and by 50% of the vote in each of at least 64 of the 107 electoral districts. This threshold was decided by the Ontario cabinet despite the recommendations of a select committee that it require only 50% support in 71 of the 107 ridings. Imagine that. This is very intriguing.

When it came to implementing a proportional representation system, one that typically is less kind to incumbents, the Ontario Liberal cabinet decided that they needed to go above and beyond the level of consent recommended by the select committee. Fifty per cent consent was advised, but the Liberals required 60%.

When it comes to ranked ballots, a system that experts say would benefit the Liberal Party, they're perfectly fine with having no consent whatsoever. Why did they require such a high level of public support to change to a system that stood to hurt them, but now require no public support for a system that benefits them?

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There is far from unanimous support for ranked ballots. In the 2007 referendum, the provincial government set the threshold for electoral change at 60% support, which is consistent with British Columbia and Prince Edward Island. Now, according to the latest poll, in Toronto, there is less than 60% support for ranked ballots.

But we know now why the Liberals are singing a different tune. As dictated by their leader, electoral reform doesn't need to bother with actually asking the public what they want. No, no, no; it's a lot simpler than that, according to the Liberals. You simply just have one person who is in a position of power make up a few new rules by themselves. But does the Ontario Liberal definition of democracy match the actual definition?

Let's talk about some Greek words here. The ancient Greek word for democracy was actually a compound word, a combination of two words into one. The first is "demos," which in ancient Greek means "people." Note that it does not mean "person" or "Premier sitting at a kitchen table over the weekend." It's a pretty key component to the whole thing; it has to be plural. The second word in democracy is "kratos," meaning power. If you combine the two words—

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: —you're absolutely right—if you combine the two words, you get "people power," or "power of the people."

To protect our democracy, we need to ensure it is open to all people, not just certain classes of people who can afford to take lengthy leaves of absence from work. We also need to ensure that the people do have a say in their electoral system, not just the people in power.

If this bill passes as it currently is written today, it could have a damaging impact on many municipalities and towns that rely on volunteer firefighters. A question

for you is this, Mr. Speaker: What if a fire breaks out during a debate in a municipality where a volunteer firefighter is running for local office? A fire truck pulls up outside to pick up the volunteer and firefighters who are inside to support their colleague who is running for office. The front door flies open and the volunteers in the crowd jump up to head outside, but as they look back at the stage, they notice that their friend isn't able to help them join the fight. One of the volunteers calls back, "There's a fire. Let's go. Come on. Why aren't you coming to help?" The volunteer firefighter candidate, according to this bill, says, "I can't help because the Liberals passed Bill 181 without an amendment."

Speaker, that may be a bit humorous and hypothetical, but this type of situation would be possible if the bill passes as is. Bill 181 seeks to remove the leave-of-absence exemption for volunteer firefighters, meaning that if they run for municipal office, they are unable to volunteer for their community for a minimum of 13 weeks. We don't want to see people forced between serving or saving their communities and their neighbours.

In my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex, we rely on approximately 325 volunteer firefighters across the municipality, specifically in Chatham-Kent. It takes a tremendous amount of commitment to be a volunteer firefighter in my riding, as it would take a tremendous amount of commitment for a volunteer firefighter in any of the ridings, really. You have to be willing to put in the work before you can be a volunteer.

The auxiliary firefighter program is approximately seven months in duration and consists of 14 training sessions that are attended by all auxiliary candidates and rotated amongst Chatham-Kent's volunteer stations. Sessions consist of minor to moderate firefighting knowledge and techniques. Once you've gotten that out of the way, you still need to meet the rest of the eligibility criteria before you can be considered for a volunteer position. It can take roughly a year, from start to finish, to become a volunteer firefighter.

We don't want to keep good people from seeking public office. In the case of a volunteer firefighter, their commitment to their communities is very clear. Considering the amount of time it takes to become a volunteer firefighter, forcing them to give up helping their community for a minimum of over three months if they want to seek public office seems somewhat ridiculous. The message this would send to these individuals would essentially be, "We're glad you want to serve your community through public office, but to do it, you first have to stop serving your community." Wait a minute: "We're glad you want to serve your community through public office, but you have to do it by first stopping to serve your community?"

Mr. Todd Smith: That just doesn't make sense.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Is there an oxymoron in there? That doesn't make much sense. You're absolutely right; you must have written this. That doesn't make sense to me, nor does it make sense to volunteer firefighters, and it doesn't make sense to Ontario.

What it means is this: We either lose out on qualified individuals who would otherwise have been able to seek public office to further serve their communities, or it could potentially mean that some communities will be short of the trained people they need to fight fires and save lives. Either way, we don't want to force people to choose between volunteering for their communities to save lives and trying to make their communities better places by running for office. We do not want to see the leave-of-absence exemption removed for volunteer firefighters, and we are hopeful that the government will be willing to address this with a sensible amendment in committee.

I'm hesitant to support any bill that has the potential to take volunteer firefighters away from any of the communities in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex. You know what, Speaker? I'll bet you dollars for doughnuts—the old saying—that there isn't one member in this Legislature who wouldn't be hesitant to support taking away any volunteer firefighters from their riding as well. I sincerely hope that the other side—the government—hears this and sorts out that part of the bill. We cannot force people to choose between serving their communities and saving them.

It isn't just volunteer firefighters who should be concerned with other elements of this bill as well. Another major concern this bill has attempted to address is that municipal election campaigns are simply far too long. I remember being here in Toronto at Queen's Park back in 2014 as the Toronto mayoral election campaign kicked off. I was taken aback at how early the campaign seemed to start.

Despite the fact that the election itself took place on October 27 of that year, the campaign essentially lasted nearly a year, because registration of candidates began back on January 2. Then began the seemingly endless speculation about who would or would not be running. John Tory registered in February, with the eventual third-place finisher, Olivia Chow, entering the race a month later. By the time October came around, the city had been in campaign mode for 10 months. Clearly that's far too long.

Election campaigns of such great length discourage new participants from seeking office, as many are unable to fund a campaign for that long. That's not what we want to see. Even the average person who has no intention of running for office deserves a break from campaigns from time to time.

Numerous groups raised concerns about the length of municipal elections, including members of the PC caucus, with many saying, like I just said, that they're far too long. Under Bill 181, registration for municipal elections will now begin on May 1 instead of January 1. That's certainly less ridiculous than a 10-month campaign period.

We support the move to shorten the length of municipal elections through moving the registration date forward a few months. However, we do have some significant concerns about the decision to move the nom-

ination cut-off date to the fourth Friday in July instead of the second Friday in September. That's roughly an extra month and half—close to two months. This will have a direct negative impact on people who want to run for council, and will actually result in an even longer writ period.

Campaigns unofficially begin when candidates register, but other than what takes place in Toronto, most of the activity starts once the field of candidates is finalized after the registration cut-off date. Moving the cut-off date more than 13 weeks, or three months, ahead of the election date will have a couple of serious consequences. Firstly, it will mean that many qualified candidates simply will not seek office.

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I want my fellow members to recall when they first registered to become a candidate for public office. Some of my colleagues, in fact, may have great difficulty remembering that long ago, but there was still a time when each and every one of us decided to take that leap of faith and register as candidates to run for our party. We were fortunate, as all of us in this Legislature are, to have been voted in by our constituents. As I look around the Legislature, I just wonder how many current members registered their candidacy as far in advance as this bill would require. How many of us would not be standing here today if we were subjected to these requirements? A lot of deep soul-searching goes into deciding to run for office. It's a decision that should not be taken lightly and is not an easy one to make.

As our critic, the member for Oxford, astutely pointed out during his lead, this change would have an especially strong impact on municipal employees. By moving the registration cut-off period from six weeks prior to the election date to an outstanding 13 weeks, it will force municipal employees to be off the job for over three months if they want to seek public office. That would include firefighters and even police officers. In addition to municipal employees, this will have a negative impact on community leaders and other citizens who are considering seeking public office.

We should be doing everything in our power to make running for office more accessible. We should be breaking down barriers, not building them up. These changes are incredibly worrisome. How many people actually take a three-month leave of absence from their job? How many people can afford to go unpaid for three months? This means that the vast majority of people will be unable to run for public office. This, Speaker, is incredibly concerning.

What is also rather worrisome about this is that it will mean that even less people will consider seeking office, which narrows the pool of potential elected officials even further. Perhaps the government only wants certain types of people to be able to run for office: a political class with the resources to take extended leaves from work or the financial ability to go without pay for a few months.

Maybe the government doesn't want to make it easier for the average person to run for office. But if they truly

share a commitment to open up public office for the entire public, not just a certain political class that can afford to run, then the Liberals will address this portion of the bill. The bill proposed by the Liberal government seeks to implement a method of determining governments that experts describe as typically benefiting parties like the Liberal Party, all of this without any required consent from impacted citizens. No individual or party can be trusted with single-handedly changing our electoral system, especially if it may have been written on the back of a napkin.

Bill 181 would create new barriers to people seeking out public office, when we should be doing all we can do to get new ideas and perspectives in government. We need good, qualified people who care about making a difference—municipally, provincially, perhaps even federally as well. Speaker, unless there are, in fact, significant amendments made to this bill at the committee stage—and now I'm appealing to the government, because all committees are stacked with Liberals who can either say yea or nay to amendments; and if past performance is an indication of future performance, a lot of those amendments will be turned down if they're offered by either opposition party.

Again, having said that, I would be very much hesitant to support moving forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise to offer some thoughts on the comments from the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, who has pointed out some of the cautionary aspects of this bill. Certainly, from my perspective as an MPP for London, I know that my community is enthusiastic about the prospect of moving forward with ranked balloting for the municipal election in 2018. But that municipal election is more than two years in the future, and the timing of this bill raises some questions, quite frankly. It was introduced on April 4, in the midst of the maelstrom of controversy that we saw over the Liberals and their campaign donations—the questions that were asked about what big money buys from the government in terms of responding with policy changes or legislative changes. Some people have asked whether this bill was an effort to change the channel, to deflect attention away from campaign donations at the provincial level and instead focus at the municipal level.

The bill does include an option for a municipal council to introduce prohibitions on campaign donations by unions and corporations. This is only an option, however, and there is some concern that municipalities may not want to take up that option because the bill also links campaign donations to the right to express an opinion on an issue. So only those who are eligible to make donations are eligible to express an opinion on an issue, which could actually stifle public expression in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions or comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure to rise again and offer my comments to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

I certainly respect the member's opinion, but I do question some things, Speaker. The question is about math. Now, I'm not suggesting that I'm a math expert, but I fail to understand how starting an election campaign on January 2 versus May 1, with the same election date, lengthens the time of the writ period. I hope he could explain that, because frankly, we saw in the last election where people were campaigning from January 2 right to the last minute, which they're allowed to do. Now they're not going to be able to register or spend any money until May 1. So if he could please explain about the Tory math that he's using, it would be helpful.

He talked about ranked ballots. It's probably not something that they would support, but we're leaving the option to the municipality. Many times, I've heard members from the opposition say that they do respect municipal government as a fair level of government, a mature level of government. That's exactly what we're trying to do: We're trying to allow that option, but those municipalities will have that option to exercise it. There are a number of ways they can do it: by having a public meeting, an open house, and, if they so wish, even a referendum.

So those options are there. Being a former municipal politician, a member of municipal government, I appreciate that flexibility.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do want to thank my colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex for his calm remarks today on Bill 181, changes to the municipal act—I don't have the exact title in front of me. He talked about the referendum on ranked balloting. That, for me, is the key problem with this bill.

As I said in my short remarks yesterday—I didn't get a chance to speak to the bill, but I did get a chance to do a response—we have had the same method of electing our representatives since Confederation and before. I'm not standing here and saying that because we've had it that long, it's perfect and there's no need for it to change. We've had changes in many minor ways. But when you're going to change dramatically, I mean completely, the method by which you elect representatives, then you need to go to a referendum, which is what happened—to the credit of the former Premier, Dalton McGuinty—in 2007, when there was this big hullabaloo about mixed-member proportional, and they went to a referendum. They allowed the people of Ontario to make the determination as to whether we would make those kinds of dramatic, critical changes to how we elected representatives to this chamber.

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The people of Ontario said no—not the government; not the Premier; not the Premier's office; the people of Ontario said no. So we need to have the same system in place if you're going to have ranked ballots.

No municipality is asking for the ranked ballot. Toronto had asked, and they've withdrawn that request. They no longer want it. Nobody is asking for it. What's the

need to proceed with that? If you do, you have a referendum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in the House and, today, to comment on the remarks from the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex. I listened intently to his well-delivered and well-thought-out remarks. Although I don't necessarily agree with everything he said, he brought out some points that are relevant in my community.

I don't think that ranked ballots are really high on the list of people's concerns in Timiskaming-Cochrane. But there are some things in this bill—specifically, who can run for public office—that are a big concern, because if you take volunteer firefighters out of the equation in very small municipalities, you're taking some of the best candidates out of the equation, or you're knocking out your fire department. It's one of two options. So that's one big shortcoming in this bill that has to be changed.

I'll have a few minutes later on to speak longer. The campaign donations and a lot of those things won't make a big difference in small towns, specifically in rural Ontario. Should we look at these? Yes. It does make one wonder why this bill was dropped on us in the middle of problems with government campaign financing. That certainly leads one to wonder what the purpose is. Is this actually trying to help the democratic process, or is it mere muddying of the waters? So far, from what I've seen from the government side, I would say it's the latter of the two.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex has two minutes.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: First of all, I would like to thank the members from London-Fanshawe, Northumberland-Quinte West, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and, of course, Timiskaming-Cochrane for their words of advice, in some cases, and their questions, in other cases, as well.

Just to be more clear to the member from Northumberland-Quinte West: I believe what I had stated was the fact that registration would now begin on May 1 of that election year, and that the nomination cut-off has been moved ahead 13 weeks. It would then start on the fourth Friday in July, as opposed to, I think it was, the second Friday in September. It has been moved. It's earlier now, 13 weeks. That's the nomination cut-off date. Usually, as soon as they register, candidates actually begin campaigning, as well. I hope that perhaps clarifies some of the confusion—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's shorter.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: No, it's 13 weeks longer, the nomination—

Mr. Bill Walker: They're not good at math over there.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Yes, that's all right.

Now, the other thing that I had spoken about was the ranked balloting. That seems to have some serious implications as well. Again, one of the biggest reasons why

we're concerned about that is due to a lack of consultation.

Past performance is an indication of future performance. We know that in past performance, this government really gets a D—maybe even an F—in consultation. We're wondering if, in fact, they're going to be scoring a D or an F in consultation on this one as well. There has been such a lack thereof.

The other concern that I have is, again, talking about volunteer firefighters and leave of absence. So we'll leave the rest to others who, I'm sure, will be bringing those issues to light a little bit further.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. It is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in Windsor West to speak to legislation in this chamber. Today we're discussing Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016, but before I get into my notes, Speaker, I wanted to point out you are looking awfully chipper today, even though the Jays lost last night. I'm thinking maybe you're hopeful they'll have better results—I think they have a game tonight, right? Hopefully, they'll have better results tonight. I noticed when I was there last night that there were several fans who weren't too happy with what was going on. We had a few fights in the stands.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A couple of fights. Not me.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I assure you that the current Speaker was not one of the fans fighting in the stands, but I'm sure he wasn't happy with the outcome regardless.

Let's begin with the intent of this legislation: It's to strengthen local democracy by giving municipalities the right to adopt ranked ballots and ban corporate and union donations, with new restrictions on third-party advertising, simplified campaign finance rules and new provisions to ensure accessibility.

Speaker, I can tell you that I have yet to have a constituent in Windsor West, or in the broader Windsor area, come forward and really express concerns about the way our municipal elections take place. My constituents are more concerned about the cost of hydro rising, the continued sell-off of Hydro One, the cuts to health care, the cuts to education, the cuts to autism services. This particular piece of legislation is really not on the radar. I'm hoping that after some discussion today, it might spark some interest from my constituents, so I'll be able to get some feedback, but really, at this time, my constituents have pressing concerns around access to health care and education and such.

I think members of this chamber will agree that this is an ambitious piece of legislation, but the objectives are, overall, good. New Democrats support reforms that strengthen our municipal democracy and that get the influence of big money out of politics. Now, as they say, the devil is in the details. Decoding these details, consulting on legislation—all of this takes time. And I'm not

talking about the nine days that we've had since they tabled this legislation. It takes a lot more time than that.

Instead of giving opposition MPPs and stakeholders a real opportunity to digest this legislation, this government is again—and this a pattern we see over and over and over—rushing legislation through the House. Stakeholders are concerned that they are not receiving enough time to properly consider this legislation. Some go as far as saying that Bill 181 will actually stifle democracy rather than enhance it.

Again, I want to go back to the importance of consultation. We hear the government side say they're consulting; we hear them stand up with their speaking notes and talk about who they've spoken to and how these people are in support. They don't actually talk about the number of people they've spoken to or those people who aren't in support. They tend to play the game so that everything they bring up is in their favour, and then they try to silence the opposition members who are charged with bringing forward the voice of our communities. Really, that's saying to the people in our communities, "Your opinion doesn't matter. We only want to hear from the people who are going to take our side, the people who are going to say that we're right and are going to back us when we ram this legislation through." I think that's really unfortunate, because it's the government's job to listen to the opposition, to listen to our constituents and act on behalf of all Ontarians, not just those who agree with them and not just the party faithful, those members of their own government. I think it's really important that they listen to everybody.

I also think it's interesting that, as other members have mentioned, this legislation came forward April 4, right in the midst of a controversy over the Liberal government's own fundraising practices. So again we see that something bubbles to the surface, something they don't want people to know about, and so they make a big announcement or they bring through legislation to try to hide the fact that something's coming to the surface that people aren't going to be very happy about. I think that's really unfortunate. That's not really being open and transparent, as they like to claim to be.

Speaker, Ontarians, stakeholders and other organizations impacted by this legislation need to be consulted, and once they're consulted, they need to be listened to. Too often, this government participates in surface-level consultations. This is when they've already made up their mind on an issue and then simply go through the motions of consultations, without actually listening to the people in the province or listening to the elected members in opposition that are bringing forward the voice of people in this province.

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There's a saying that says, "Just because we have spoken doesn't mean we've communicated." I think people are getting really tired of feeling like they've come to government, and they've spoken to the government, but they haven't really communicated because the government side, the Liberal side, is not willing to listen

to them. They're not willing to take into consideration those people that don't support their ideas or those people that come forward and say, "That seems like a good idea, but we would like to see changes. We'd like to see it tweaked a bit." So I think people are getting really tired of wasting their time and their energy, frankly, speaking to a government that seems to want to do whatever it is they want to do, and they're not willing to listen to anybody else.

I think we just have to look—just recently, in fact. There are many examples; for instance, the pre-budget consultations. The consultations took place. The government pretended to be listening to people. People wasted their time, energy and, in some cases, money to travel, to prepare for the consultations, to come to these consultations, only to find out that, before the report came from the committee, the budget was not only already drawn up, it was printed, it was translated into French and it was ready to go. We didn't receive the report until after the budget was already tabled. I think that's a clear example of the government ramming through their agenda rather than listening to the people of Ontario.

Another issue: provincial and demonstration school consultations. Now, I'm happy to announce that, today, the minister said that she would reopen enrolment for these schools for the 2016-17 school year. But I do have to point out that when she was speaking to the media earlier, she would not commit to actually keeping these programs open for that entire school year—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm just wondering if the member opposite could actually stick with Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. It might be helpful for the sake of debate this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes, the member has drifted quite a bit, and I've been pretty lenient. So could you maybe come back toward the bill once in a while to make it legit, please?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. It's always interesting when the Minister of Transportation shows up in the House. You get a lot of exercise, up and down out of your chair, when he's in the room.

I was tying it back to the bill, in fact: We're talking about consultation with the public—talking to municipalities, talking to voters, consulting and actually listening. I was tying that into the fact that, when we're looking at school closures, there's a process that they say has taken place with consultations, but they haven't actually been listening to those people they're consulting with, just like they haven't really given people an opportunity to consult on this particular piece of legislation. The same thing has happened with the child care regulations that they were going to ram through: They weren't going to listen to the people of Ontario, just like with this bill.

They bring it forward during a controversy—one on their side, around fundraising—and nine days later, we are on day 3 of second reading. In nine days, we've made

it to second reading, day 3, on a bill that—there is no possible way that the broader public could possibly have been made aware of this bill, read the bill, formulated questions or concerns or given appropriate feedback. There's no way the municipalities have had time to look at these and give feedback. So I think it's really important, as much as the Minister of Transportation likes to get up on a point of order and try and get me to stop talking about it. There is no way that people have had an opportunity to really consult on this. I think that's a clear example of trying to stifle conversation on it, in fact.

The provisions in this bill allow municipalities to use ranked ballots. School board trustees will not be subject to the option of ranked ballots at this time, but the door has been left open for that to change in the future. Municipalities have the options of banning corporate and union donations. Clerks must prepare an accessibility plan before election day as well as post an election accessibility report. There are simplified campaign finance rules and shorter campaign periods—starting in May instead of January.

Talking about third-party advertising, there is no lower threshold below which smaller third parties would be exempt from the third-party advertising restrictions. All other Canadian jurisdictions set a lower spending threshold of \$500 or \$1000 in their third-party advertising laws. So there has been no adjustment here. Third parties that incur advertising expenses, including those that spend just a few dollars, face compliance obligations similar to those of a candidate.

There are concerns that a municipality may be less likely to ban corporate and union donations if they must silence community groups at the same time. I think that's a key piece when people feel they can't express an opinion. If something comes forward that they don't agree with, this legislation could potentially stifle their ability to come forward and say, "We have concerns about that."

It's really muddying the waters between a person's ability to freely speak about what they support and don't support. I think that ties back perfectly to something I said earlier about the government only talking about people who have come forward—their friends, maybe—in support of proposed legislation, but they don't talk about people who don't support it. My concern is that this is going to stifle the voices of Ontarians, rather than opening up opportunities for them to be fully consulted and make a difference in legislation that comes through this House.

There are other provisions. There is no tightening of enforcement to stop candidates from overspending and no consideration of voting rights for permanent residents. To not even consider voting rights for permanent residents is very problematic, especially for people in my riding of Windsor West. When I'm in the community campaigning, or even just knocking on doors checking in on my constituents, I hear how frustrated permanent residents are about this issue. They are members of my community and want to participate in the democratic

process, and it's really frustrating when their spouses are citizens and are able to vote. You have some members of a household who are able to participate in the democratic process and others who cannot.

I can tell you that my riding—Windsor itself is very diverse, but I think that we in Windsor West probably experience the most diversity. We have a lot of people who choose to come to Canada and live in Ontario—more specifically, in Windsor and in my riding of Windsor West—and I can tell you that my office gets many calls from people who are of the impression that because they can't vote, it means they don't have representation. I think it's unfortunate for them to think they don't have a voice because they are not able to vote in a provincial election.

I think it becomes even more confusing for people, and frankly more disappointing, when they've chosen Ontario as their home and are made permanent residents, but they don't have a say in the decisions we make in this House or the decisions that are made at the municipal level. I think it's a very important piece of democracy that those people who choose to come to Ontario and choose a city to live in—whether it's Windsor or Toronto or a northern city, wherever they choose to live—feel like they're part of that democratic process and get to say, "This is who I would like to be my representative provincially, this is who I'd like my city councillor to be, and this is who I'd like my mayor or my school board trustees to be." I think it's very unfortunate that that wasn't considered in the legislation.

Again, we shouldn't be giving people the idea that they can't have a say or that they don't have a say. We want a government that claims to be open and transparent, and we actually want them to be open and transparent. We expect the same from our municipal partners. We need people to know that if they're not happy with the performance of someone who is an elected official, they have the right to cast their vote for someone else the next time around. They need to know that they do, indeed, have a say in democracy.

Part of the issue is that third parties that incur advertising expenses, including individuals who spend just a few dollars, face compliance obligations that are similar to those of a candidate. If they make a mistake with their paperwork, an individual or small community group could be banned from advertising in the next election and could even face a fine of up to \$25,000 for an individual or \$50,000 for a corporation, as well as a six-month prison term. Imagine that, Speaker: Someone who doesn't really know the legislation, someone who's not clear on the legislation, makes an honest mistake, and there are very stiff penalties for that.

1650

People need to know that the government is doing everything possible to make legislation clear and make the rules clear, because I think you will find that the majority of people really want to do the right thing. They want to follow the rules, they want to do the right thing and they certainly don't want to be breaking the law. I think that when you're ramming through legislation like

this, and there hasn't really been fair consultation and it's not clear what everybody's rights and obligations are, you may find more and more people who are inadvertently breaking the rules. They're facing very stiff penalties: \$25,000 for an individual who might just accidentally break the rules, and they could end up in prison for it. We could go on about the prison system and how it would be unfortunate for someone to accidentally break the law and not even realize they've done that, and end up in a prison system that is already overcrowded and understaffed, but if I was to go on about that, I'm sure the Minister of Transportation would get up on a point of order and point out that I'm out of line—because they don't want to hear about those issues either, frankly.

The other unfortunate piece of this, the flaw in it, is that Bill 181 inexplicably links the right to promote an issue to the right to make a campaign contribution. Since Toronto bans corporate union donations, Bill 181 would silence all Toronto NGOs, charities and community groups that speak out on an issue during a six-month campaign, to oppose the proposal. Again, this is actually potentially stifling democracy, by not allowing people to voice their concerns. It's the government's way of saying, "If you're in opposition to something, we don't want to hear about it." I think that's unfortunate, because that's how we grow and we learn. That's how you come forward with better legislation. That's how municipalities make better decisions for the people that they represent. They want to hear the good and they want to hear the bad, and often, out of the bad they get suggestions. They get good suggestions, and sometimes they're not-so-good suggestions. But often they'll get good suggestions from the people who live in that municipality on how to make the municipality better, and I think to put rules in place that are actually banning people from being able to say, "I don't like something," is a little heavy-handed. I think it's our obligation, as elected officials, whether it's at the municipal level, the provincial level, the federal level, school boards—our job is to listen to both the good and the bad, listen to those people who agree with us and those people who don't agree with us.

Not everybody has the opportunity that the Minister of Transportation does to stand up and say, "Point of order: I think they're out of line. Let's bring it back." We need people to have that right to say, "I don't agree with what you're saying. Let's sit down and talk about it. Hear my side of it and maybe, just maybe, you might change your mind." Every elected official needs to be open-minded, willing to listen to the people. Whether it's someone who has voted for you or not, you are elected to represent them. We need to make sure that when people are voting, they have the opportunity to say to candidates, "I don't like something that you've spoken about. I don't like a position you're taking. I'd like you to explain it to me. I'd like to explain to you why I don't like it," and give a candidate the opportunity to change their position on something.

I think that a municipality would be far less likely to ban corporate and union donations if they must silence

community groups at the same time. I don't think any municipality really wants to shut down the voice of their community, the people in the community. We wouldn't have city councillors, we wouldn't have mayors, we wouldn't have MPPs, we wouldn't have MPs, if it wasn't for our constituents. I don't think that any municipality wants to completely shut out the voice of their communities; maybe the Liberal government does, but I don't think the municipalities want to, and I think that would be a very unfortunate side effect of this legislation here.

Again, there's no tightening of enforcement to stop candidates from overspending their limit, and there is no consideration of voting rights for permanent residents. I think that putting an idea forward is one thing; follow-through is another. If you really want to reform the way elections are run, the way campaigns are done, it really has to be a democratic process. You need to have a lot of people at the table and take the time to have these conversations. It's not something you do on a napkin at your kitchen table; it's not something you do when you have friends over for dinner: figure out how you're going to change the laws that affect thousands of people. It's something that takes a great deal of thought and a great deal of consultation. I don't think, nor do many of my colleagues, whether in my caucus or the PC caucus, that there has been any real consultation done on this bill, considering that it has been nine days since it has been introduced. It couldn't possibly have been vetted properly through the municipalities and through the constituents that it's going to affect.

Thank you for your time, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It's always a pleasure to follow fast on the heels of a misguided member of the New Democratic Party here in this chamber, Speaker. I want to congratulate the member for her remarks, especially after you advised her to stick to the actual debate that we are involved in this afternoon on Bill 181. I recognize that after she was sufficiently admonished by the Chair, she did turn her attention to the debate at hand.

I know there are a number of people in the chamber who have served municipally throughout their careers and others who have sought office municipally. In 2010, before I became the member of provincial Parliament for Vaughan, I had the chance to run municipally in my community, in the city of Vaughan, and wasn't successful. Though it was my first time running as a candidate, I did get to—not surprisingly—experience the ins and outs of a number of the issues that are addressed in this legislation first-hand, in that case.

I can tell you, Speaker, that a number of the initiatives that will empower our municipal partners—for example, some of the campaign finance reform initiatives, the timing of the electoral calendar and other initiatives that are contained in Bill 181—will actually go a long way, perhaps, in a most transformational way, towards making that system of municipal campaigns across the 444 communities—well, I'll say "443" because, in some re-

spects, the city of Toronto already has some of these powers. For the remainder of the communities across the province of Ontario, bringing about a level playing field and bringing about a certain degree of equality and parity with respect to what already exists, in some respects, in the city of Toronto is a good thing.

I don't have enough time to get into the issue of whether or not we should be considering extending voting rights to permanent residents, but I will say that I don't personally support that. I think the bar to becoming a citizen in this country is relatively low for those who are interested in seeking that outcome, which then, of course, gives you the chance to vote in our election campaigns.

I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I have the pleasure to speak to Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I spoke for 20 minutes yesterday, and I'm going to just repeat a few things here.

It's definitely a big, big concern that I want to get on the record again: No government should be making unilateral changes to the system under which they would be getting elected. It's just inappropriate that one party would ever think that they should be able to do this and that they actually have the knowledge and the wisdom. It should certainly be a case where all three parties are around the table. Very similarly, my leader, Patrick Brown, has asked to make sure that we have a select committee to talk about fundraising and third-party advertising going forward.

I find it very interesting, Mr. Speaker, that this government has proposed a bill that actually talks about third-party advertising and yet they voted it down three times. My colleague Ted Arnott, my colleague Rick Nicholls and I have all presented third-party advertising private members' bills in this House, and that government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, voted unanimously against them. Yet now, all of a sudden, they think that they should bring this out and that there are issues. So I'm a little torn about why, all of a sudden, it's a thing they want but they didn't do it when they had the opportunity back in October. As recently as October, the elections officer for Ontario, Greg Essensa, had brought that in two or three of his reports, saying it was a key priority.

I'm very concerned that they would actually think that anything that's going to change the fundamental democratic right of a voter voting for who is going to be representing them could be done by one party anywhere, regardless of what political stripe might think that—but especially with the trust of this government and what we've had over the last number of years that I've been here.

Mr. Speaker, this bill with ranked ballots—our fear, again, is that it's not something that should be done overnight. There's suspicion that they would be doing it for their own advantage. I don't necessarily say that, but

that's what I hear in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. So we definitely want the people to have a referendum and a say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to congratulate my colleague the member from Windsor West on her comments on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. She made some really excellent points that I think we should reflect on carefully in this chamber. In particular, she talked about the lack of consultation.

1700

We've heard from the Liberals across the way that there were 4,000 comments or pages or whatever that were submitted in advance of this bill, but that is consultation before the bill was developed. It does appear, given the problems with some of the provisions of this bill, that it was rushed through without doing the proper consultation on the actual drafting of the bill once the legislation was written.

We know, for example, that the third-party advertising provisions, which are modelled after the third-party laws that are in place in BC, are currently subject to a Supreme Court challenge. Why the government would have brought the exact same provisions that are being challenged in the Supreme Court in BC into Ontario—it raises all kinds of questions.

We know that stakeholders that we have communicated with feel that they have had nowhere near enough time to be able to digest the bill, to do the kind of analysis that is necessary to understand what the legal implications are in terms of freedom of expression, given the restrictions on third-party advertising.

I know that ranked ballots are welcomed by some people in this province, in particular in my community of London. But I'm very concerned because Bill 181 brings a number of different things together, and it's a really mixed bag.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's a pleasure again to rise in the House to make a few comments to the member from Windsor West.

Let's bring it back a little bit. What we're doing with Bill 181 is something that we do after every municipal election. It's not something that just started out of the blue. It's something that we have to do, to review the Municipal Elections Act after every municipal election.

I want to focus a little bit on the consultation, because the member, when she was speaking about Bill 181, spent quite a bit of time on the lack of consultation.

I know that AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, had an opportunity to give us input on this. The concept of where we wanted to go was presented. They were expecting it, because it's something you do after every election. There were some 3,400 inputs from municipal leaders and members of the public on what this should look like at the end of the day.

The minister has made a commitment to visit—and he did, last year—over 200 municipalities. I presume a lot of

the discussion was around this piece of legislation. We spoke with folks—I know I did as parliamentary assistant—both at AMO and the ROMA/Good Roads convention. I heard that we needed more consultation. Part of the process here, as we all know, is that after second reading—hopefully this passes second reading—it will go to committee, and there will again be input for consultation.

I just want to say that this is a bill that was presented. We're doing second reading. It'll go to committee. Hopefully we'll hear some good suggestions that can make the bill better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Windsor West has two minutes.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to thank the Minister of Transportation, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, the member from London West and the member from Northumberland-Quinte West for all sharing their thoughts with me on the debate on Bill 181.

I'd like to start, Speaker, by saying I'm sure you're going to sleep a lot better tonight knowing that the Minister of Transportation approves of the way that you do your job. I'm sure that'll make you feel a lot better tonight.

I'd like to touch on what the member for Northumberland-Quinte West said, because I think it really drives the point home of what the member from London West said. I'm not sure that he was listening when she made her point, because he just actually made her point for her. He said that they spoke to AMO about the concept and the direction they wanted to go around legislation to reform the Municipal Elections Act. They spoke about a concept, what the government would like to do and what AMO would like, which is fantastic. That's great. Ask for opinions before drafting the bill.

Our point—the point the member from London West made—is that that's very different than actually consulting on a bill once it's drafted. It's very different. It's great to go out and say, “We'd like your ideas.”

Interjection.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'm getting the hand from the member for Northumberland-Quinte West; apparently, the truth hurts.

It's great to go out and ask for input on what should be in a bill, but they can sneak all kinds of stuff into a bill—make it wordy, make it muddy and then say, “Well, we consulted.” The municipalities and the people who live in those municipalities need to have a say in what is actually written in the bill; not the concept but the legislation that is actually being proposed.

I have to thank the member for Northumberland-Quinte West for driving home the point that the member from London West was making. Clearly, the government thinks that just throwing an idea out there is consultation. Frankly, it's not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I'm now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one half hours of debate on this motion for

second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: We wish to continue the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate here this afternoon on Bill 183. Do you know what? Horse races are a lot of fun. We've all been involved in horse races over the years. Prior to arriving here, I was the news director at Quinte Broadcasting in Belleville—

Interjections.

Mr. Todd Smith: Did I say “183”?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Yes.

Mr. Todd Smith: I meant to say “181”. Thank you. I apologize. It happens. Bill 181 is what we're debating here this afternoon, which is actually the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016. The critic is here, so I've got to get it right.

As I was saying, as a former news director at Quinte Broadcasting, I used to love election campaigns. It was a lot of fun. There were a lot of interesting things happening and interesting characters in the race.

From time to time, even at a small radio station in eastern Ontario, we would have polls. I know that one of the things we experience on a larger scale at the provincial level and, of course, the federal election that we just went through a few months back, is that there's a lot of polling that goes on. It's fun for broadcasters to follow the polls; that's for sure. I think it probably drives people crazy in their homes—all the phone calls they're getting from the myriad of pollsters that there are out there. But the bottom line is that these horse races are kind of fun. They make great fodder for radio talk shows and political panels. We get to talk about who is up and who is down in the polls. We get to talk about those polls over the water cooler as well, and who is leading in each electoral district and these kinds of things.

Who didn't watch with a little bit of nervous anxiety a couple of years ago when John Tory fended off challenges from both the right and the left? Who doesn't like talking about the momentum that pollsters are observing as they incessantly bug us in our homes by calling night after night? The answer to all this, really, is the voters. While the talking heads on radio and TV love it, most voters really don't think too much about it.

I've been here for close to five years now, and the only meeting or communication I ever had on this issue was with the people from the Ranked Ballot Initiative of Toronto. They're the only people I've ever talked to about this issue in this building, and I've never talked to anybody in the riding. It's just not something that people are interested in talking about.

My constituents ask me about a whole bunch of other things. They talk to me about the state of our hospitals. They talk to me about the state of health care or soaring electricity rates. They talk to me about keeping demonstration schools open. I actually can't remember a single

time that a person who wasn't making money in the political world talked to me about changing the rules of the game. When a news outlet in Thunder Bay took a poll on this issue, only 17% of people wanted the system changed.

1710

There are multiple instances in the United States where a municipality has unilaterally changed its voting system, fought an election under that system, and then, the first opportunity after the election, went back to the first-past-the-post system, because it works.

As we've seen in this House repeatedly, this government comes down on the side of those in power instead of ensuring that our democracy is protected against being manipulated by those in power. That's why I can't see myself necessarily supporting this bill, although there are some good things in this bill. But I can't see myself supporting this bill unless municipalities have to have a referendum before changing the voting system. It only makes sense; these are the rules of the game. If whoever gets the thimble automatically gets hotels on Park Place and Boardwalk, there isn't a lot of point in playing Monopoly if those are the rules that we're playing by. We're here to reflect the issues, concerns and values of our constituents that we hear about on a daily basis, not to rig the rules to protect the right of a precious few with the levers of power.

Is our democracy perfect? It absolutely isn't; of course not. We'd like more people to vote. On this, I agree with the mayor of Belleville, who said, "I don't think the system is broken.... Someone has to figure out how to get more people out to vote. I'm flabbergasted that people don't exercise their right."

This isn't going to do it. This has nothing to do with getting more people to vote. As a matter of fact, and we've heard a lot about it here this afternoon in the House, it's probably going to make it more complicated for people to vote.

There are some good issues in this legislation—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock. The Minister of Agriculture has had an ongoing dialogue.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I apologize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Yes, thank you. I appreciate it.

Continue.

Mr. Todd Smith: The member from Peterborough has been elected many times. I wonder if maybe he would have been unseated if there was a ranked ballot.

Hon. Jeff Leal: You never can tell.

Mr. Todd Smith: You never can tell.

But you need to have a referendum if you're going to change the way that people vote. You have to have a referendum if you're going to change the electoral rules. It's really that simple.

We saw a record turnout in the federal election in the fall. It was a record turnout. Nothing changed there. It was a first-past-the-post election. What you have to do is

work harder as a political party to get your point across, or if you're not a political party—if you're a municipal candidate—you have to work hard to get your message out. If your message is a message that resonates with people and inspires the people in your community and your municipality or your township, whatever it might be, you're probably going to get elected because people believe in what you're saying. We don't need to change the way the system works. We just need our politicians to do a better—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's just like The Muppet Movie. I already asked the Minister of Agriculture—he's being baited, I know, but it happens.

Continue.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The one thing about politicians is that they have a lot to say, even when they're not supposed to be speaking, as we've found out in this place. There's even a few guys on my side who are like that—not very many.

I've yet to speak to a politician or a public servant who didn't want more people voting. We all do, even if that means that it takes a little bit longer to canvass a poll at election time. My volunteers get on my case all the time because I'll have 10- and 15-minute conversations on the doorsteps when I'm canvassing. I know many members in the House are probably the same way. You'll be out knocking on doors, you meet a fine gentleman who's mowing his lawn, and you end up talking to him for 10 or 15 minutes about whatever it is that concerns him. I can tell you that it's never about changing the electoral system. It's always about something else: the price of gas for his lawn mower, or the fact that he can no longer use Weed Man anymore to make that grass grow green and get rid of the thistles. It's always something, but it's never, never about electoral reform.

The reason I love to go door to door and talk to people during an election campaign is because those are the real conversations—and those are the conversations that this government hasn't had when it comes to developing or modernizing the electoral system in Ontario. You have to meet with real people and have those real conversations. It's one thing to talk to AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and get a general theme as to what they might like, but at the end of the day—and I keep coming back to that R-word—it's all about the referendum, before we actually put changes in place, and it shouldn't be up to a majority government in Ontario to decide which way that happens.

Nothing I do better informs my work than actually meeting with real people and having conversations on people's doorsteps, and I suppose many of us would say the same thing. So if we can agree that we're best informed by the people who send us to this place, and if we can agree that they should be the ones whose interests are served by the rules of the game, then why don't we let them decide if they want the rules to change? What better, more important decision can we seek the public's opinion on than whether the rules of democracy should change?

We have a hard enough time now getting people to vote. We have a hard enough time convincing people that the operations of the political system are done in their interest. If the members opposite are so sure that the number is greater than the 17% who told Thunder Bay News Watch that they support the change to ranked ballots, then they can prove it.

In 2018, every municipality is printing ballots. Those interested in changing their electoral system can add the question to the bottom of the ballot and let the voters decide. How could there possibly be any objection to this? It would be right there at the bottom of their 2018 municipal election ballot: “Do you believe that we should adopt da da da da?”—and I can’t wait to see how Hansard puts that in the Hansard.

There is one thing, though: We’re being told that we can’t hold a referendum because there’s a referendum bias. We’re told that referendums favour the status quo. People who oppose referendums on electoral reform tell us that we can’t have a referendum because it’s unfair, and if you believe that government is the solution to literally every problem, then I suppose that makes sense. I certainly don’t believe that, because in order to believe that government is the solution to literally every problem, you have to believe that the people running the government know better and that only they are capable of solving a complex problem.

There’s no doubt that informing voters about electoral reform is difficult, but since when has difficulty ever been a reason not to do something? “It’s hard” is a description but it’s not an excuse. We all live and die by this rule every election cycle. It’s hard to convince people the deficit is important or that it isn’t. It’s hard to convince people to reform the beverage alcohol system or not. Anyone who has lived through a 36-day writ period knows that convincing people is hard. It puts miles on your boots or your shoes and puts lines on your face, depending on how the campaign goes. It takes time, it takes money and it takes a heck of a lot of effort to get elected. “It’s hard” has never been an accepted reason anywhere not to do something. If you really believe in it, you tend not to care how hard it is to do, which brings me to why we end up talking about this issue.

Recent examples in the United States have demonstrated that electoral reform discussions tend to pop up when people get election results they don’t necessarily like—I know Aaron Sorkin has been quoted quite a bit in the House by different members of the Legislature—but sometimes, in a democracy, other people win.

Traditionally, when we change the rules of our democracy, we try to do so in a way that advantages or disadvantages no particular party. That’s to keep those who may have a massive conflict of interest from unilaterally rigging the system. But as I said earlier, we’re seeing this as part of an emerging trend whenever the rules of democracy are discussed.

1720

All three parties in this Legislature agree on reforming election financing laws, and there is a section in this bill

on election financing—I’m sure there is—third-party advertising, anyway. Does the Premier allow it to be an organic process? Of course, we’re talking about something completely different here, but I know the Speaker will give me a little bit of latitude. All three parties agree on reforming election financing laws. Does the Premier allow it to be an organic process developed by a committee with equal partisan representation?

Mr. Bill Walker: You would think so.

Mr. Todd Smith: You would think so. But, no, unfortunately, that’s not the case.

My colleague from Simcoe–Grey outlined a very troubling sequence of events wherein donations coincided with government decisions. Does the Premier agree to a public inquiry so potential wrongdoing can be investigated? Of course, no, she doesn’t. The Premier called a meeting of the three party leaders and told them that rules drafted in secret were going to be the new rules, thus single-handedly confirming every voter’s chief suspicion of those in power: that their single and sole purpose is to hold on to that power. I think that’s what we’re seeing here. A number of speakers here this afternoon have talked about the fact that, when a sitting government changes the rules, they’re obviously going to be tempted to change those rules to benefit them down the road.

The other thing is—and I go back to what I was saying earlier—this is not a priority for people. I know it’s something that has to be done, as the member opposite indicated, at the end of every municipal election. There was a lot of talk about the idea that maybe the Legislature would be prorogued after this three-week period. I think a lot of people were believing that that was where we were going to head, that the Legislature was going to be prorogued. There wasn’t new legislation on the order paper for us to discuss. And, then, all of a sudden—boom—there’s Bill 181, which appears out of the blue. There wasn’t a whole lot of consultation or discussion with the people of Ontario about this. But here we are, debating it.

What generally happens when we have bills here in the Legislature is that we have the initial debate at second reading; then we have a closure motion; then it will be rushed into committee; then it will be even more swiftly moved out of committee, with as little consultation or input from the public as possible; and, wham, Bob’s your uncle, the next thing you know, we’ve got this passed into law in Ontario, with very, very little consultation. I fear that’s what might happen here.

That’s why we’ve been talking about select committees and equal representation on these committees, or committees that would have the Chief Electoral Officer having some input as well, or even, in some committees that we’ve been talking about, the Integrity Commissioner involved in that as well.

The member opposite talks about wishful thinking; it really is wishful thinking. They do have a majority government. They do have a majority government, I’ll give them that. They earned their majority government.

Mr. Bill Walker: They shouldn't abuse it.

Mr. Todd Smith: But, as my colleague from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has just said, they really shouldn't abuse that power, because something as important as this demands consultation with the public. And it demands more than that, because, as we've been talking about all afternoon, it deserves the public to have the final say on any major changes that are made to our electoral system. The only way you can do that is to have a referendum.

As I said earlier, the ballots are going to be printed, Madam Speaker. The ballots are going to be printed in the fall of 2018, and they're going to have John Smith, and they're going to have Lou Jones and Bill Yakabuski on the ballot.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Bill? My own cousin might challenge me?

Mr. Todd Smith: And do you know what? It would be really easy, at the bottom of that ballot, to have one more question: "The government of Ontario has proposed changes to the Municipal Elections Act to go to a ranked ballot system. Do you agree? Yes or no?" That's who should be making the decision on this. It shouldn't be a majority government at Queen's Park making a decision that so drastically impacts our electoral system.

Sometimes what happens here—my friend from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke describes it as the guillotine coming down and slicing off debate. He makes a very effective sound effect every time the House leader or deputy House leader moves a closure motion. We've seen that time and time again. They should not be using a blunt instrument—and a guillotine is not a blunt instrument—to pass legislation in this House.

We're all here as elected members from our municipalities taking our marching orders from our constituents to come here and represent them at Queen's Park. We should have the opportunity to express our concerns with this system. But more importantly—again, I'll reiterate the fact—the only way that I will be supporting Bill 181 is to see that referendum question on the bottom of the ballot before any substantial changes are made to the way that we vote in our municipal elections in 2018.

Thank you for our 20 minutes this afternoon, Madam Speaker. I appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West to respond to the comments from the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Many of the concerns that he raises are shared by the members on our side of the row here, in particular around the lack of consultation. I know that the Liberals across the way will talk about all the consultation that was done before the bill was drafted. However, they can do all the consultation that they want and put whatever they want in the bill; what is really critical is the consultation on the draft legislation.

We know that this bill was rushed into the House. It appeared suddenly on April 4 in the midst of all of the

controversy that the Premier was dealing with about campaign financing, which really calls into question whether this bill was given the sort of careful analysis and thought that it required.

For example, there are new third-party advertising provisions that include restrictions on third-party advertising that are, quite frankly, unprecedented in this province. We have seen similar restrictions in BC. Those restrictions are currently subject to a Supreme Court challenge by the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association because of the concern that those third-party advertising laws are creating a chilly climate for smaller groups. They are suppressing the voice of smaller organizations to participate in the electoral process and to raise issues that they are concerned about during municipal campaigns.

These are very real concerns about the content of this bill. It deserves to have much fuller thought and analysis.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's always a delight for me to be in the chamber and hear my good friend from Prince Edward–Hastings. We in Peterborough were very sad when the Belleville Bulls left town and relocated to Hamilton, Ontario. We had a great rivalry. If I recall correctly, I think the member from Prince Edward–Hastings may have been the voice of the Belleville Bulls for a period of time during his very distinguished radio career. He added some comments today.

I served in municipal politics. I had the great privilege of being in municipal politics in my hometown of Peterborough from 1985 until the fall of 2003. Then I got elected here in the Ontario Legislature.

You know, it's important, I think, after every municipal election in Ontario—the tradition has been that the election would be reviewed. People would go out and get opinions from people who are elected, people who were not elected, clerks and treasurers who were running the election and people at large.

1730

Bill 181 looks at ways to improve municipal elections in the province of Ontario. My good friend from Prince Edward–Hastings indicated that, if the ranked ballot had been in Peterborough in 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, 1997 or 2000, I may not have been successful during those—I must qualify that, in 1991, I did get acclaimed, so we'll take that one out of the mix.

But I think some of the things that we're proposing here—we all want to limit third-party advertising. This is something that the opposition and the third party have been talking about.

So this debate will continue, Mr. Speaker. We'll take this bill on the road, and we'll hear from everybody, from every corner in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Which one is standing up here?

Mr. Randy Hillier: The only one at their desk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh, okay. I just wondered.

The one from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's a pleasure to listen to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings on Bill 181.

I just want to make mention, again, that this is called debate but nobody actually engages in a debate. When somebody puts forth a position, like the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, the idea here is that the other parties will respond and challenge those arguments with their own evidence. But all we get is debate and then statements from the Liberal side. Even when they have their turn, they just make statements. They don't advance any evidence for their position.

The member from Prince Edward–Hastings mentioned frequently the need for referendums and to have public consent and public approval for alterations to the electoral system. Absolutely, it's fundamental in our system of government. I've seen that the Liberals have not responded to that and have sort of shrugged it off with, "Well, governments don't need to go to the people to get consent for these fundamental changes."

I know there are some governments that have never bothered going to get approval. Fidel Castro changed the voting system in Cuba without having a referendum. I know that Kim Jong Il's father changed the voting system in North Korea without going for a referendum. There are examples where governments will unilaterally bring forward electoral reforms, just as Kathleen Wynne is now trying to do both municipally and provincially with the kitchen table or kitchen cabinet napkin process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's a pleasure to rise and add my two minutes' worth on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, 2016, and comment on the remarks made by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

As my colleague from London West pointed out, we do share some of the concerns with the PC caucus. Most of that is around consultation and consultation being done in earnest; not just saying they're going to consult and they're going to listen, but actually listening to the people who they consult with and taking those things into consideration and putting them into a bill—not just the people who agree with them, but listening to people who don't agree with them and listening to their suggestions.

I think a really important point that the member from London West brought up—and it ties back into consultation—is around the third-party advertising laws. I'm wondering how much research the government has actually done into third-party advertising laws before they put it in this bill because, as the member from London West pointed out, in BC, there is a Supreme Court challenge over third-party advertising laws. It was a Supreme Court challenge by the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association, or BC FIPA.

We have concerns about how much thought has actually been put into this legislation. As the government

side has pointed out, they talked to AMO and some other people prior to drafting the legislation to talk about the concept, but we need consultation on the actual drafted bill.

These are concerns that we share with other members on this side of the House from the other party. We need to make sure that this is a very well-thought-out piece of legislation, because it's going to affect the way democracy plays out. We need the government to really consult with people, really listen and take their ideas not just into consideration, but enact some of those ideas.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings has two minutes.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you to the members from London West, Windsor West, Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, and from Peterborough, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, for their comments here this afternoon on my 20-minute chat on Bill 181.

Do you know what? The bottom line here is that the SS Liberal battleship is taking on water. There are a lot of holes in that ship right now. They're making it up on the go; they're making it up on the fly. They're quickly running out of life preservers; they're pulling them from anywhere they can possibly find one of those life preservers.

They're not just making it up on the fly, they're making it up at the kitchen table. We had a couple of flip-flops today on daycare and demonstration schools. We've had different changes being made over the last couple of days on other issues as well. Suddenly, we had this come-to-reality moment when we decided that we had to change the election financing reforms in the province of Ontario.

Everything that we're seeing is that last grasp. We're hanging on to the railing of the SS Liberal battleship as it's starting to go down. We're doing everything we can to hold on to power. We're throwing legislation in when everybody thought we were going to prorogue just so that we don't get a bad story about proroguing. Now, we're getting bad stories about all kinds of other things.

This Liberal government is taking on water so fast, they're doing everything they can. In this case, they're afraid to consult the people on a referendum on major electoral change in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Before we move on to further debate, I'll remind the members that we've had seven hours, and now it's 10-minute hits.

Interjection: Ten-minute rotations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Ten-minute rotations.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House and debate issues that are of importance to the people of the province and the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane. Today, it's Bill 181, Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I can honestly say that since I've been elected—for five years—I have only had one person approach me in the riding regarding any changes to the Municipal Elections Act. That person—I'll give a shout-out to the Green

candidate in the last election—was really enthused about things like this, but no one else. And again, the Green candidate, Max, was in the political class. Politics is really important to Max.

This isn't, in my opinion, an issue that is burning in the hearts of the people of Timiskaming-Cochrane. I hope that it is an issue that is burning in the hearts of other areas, because it's not in mine. Having said that, Ontario is a vast province with vast issues, and I'm happy to be able to lend my voice to it for a few minutes.

But first, before I start on the issues about it, I'd like to give a shout-out to municipal politicians, and specifically the mayors, reeves and councillors across the province. In my riding, I have 26 mayors and reeves, and I've got a bunch more roads boards, because I have, as a lot of people in northern Ontario have, unorganized townships that have no government, which is a whole other concept.

I'd like to give a shout-out to all of them and specifically to some of them—in one case, the mayor of Cochrane, who represents his town. He also ran provincially. He was a worthy opponent. We don't always agree, but Mr. Politis and I always work together for the benefit of the people of Cochrane, as I do with my other mayors.

1740

I'd like to back up for a second. I heard the chief whip of the Liberal side, as I was listening today, say that she hopes this bill would bring more female representation into municipal politics. I really don't know how this bill is going to do that, but I would like to give a shout-out to Joanne Savage, the mayor of West Nipissing, and to be the first to announce that—you know how in the fall we shut the Legislature down and we go to the plowing match? Well, in 2019, we might have to shut it down for a bit longer, because we're going to go to West Nipissing to the plowing match. That's due in large part to the hard work of Mayor Savage and her council. I would like to give a shout-out for that, because that will be the second time the plowing match comes to northern Ontario. It was great the first time, and it might just be greater the second time. It's a really great achievement.

I spent a bit of time as a councillor in a small township. I was a councillor for 12 years. There have been a few comments here that municipal politicians are the closest to the people, and they are. I recall, when I first got elected here, that we had a class come—I believe it was a grade 6 class from Cochrane. I'm sure all of you will know this picture: They go to the ground staircase, they line all the kids up, and we talk to the kids. I don't know how everyone else does it, but usually I ask, "Do you have any questions?" And this teacher had prepped the kids, because this grade 6 guy—I think it was grade 6—asked me what the difference was between the three levels of government. The teacher had done some prep work there, because in grade 6, I really didn't care about the three levels of government.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: You didn't know there were three.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's right.

And one of the people from the protocol stepped in and said, "Mr. Vanthof, we can answer that question." I

said, "No, no. I think I can handle that." I said, "If there's a pothole on Railway Street in Cochrane, who do you call?" They said, "You call the mayor," because that's municipal. That's a municipal road. I said, "If there's a pothole on Highway 11, who do you call?" They looked around, and I said, "You call the province. You can call me." I said, "If there's a pothole in a country you've never heard of, who do you call?" You call the federal government. The tour guides thought it was funny. The kids got it.

But the moral of that story is, the people who are the closest to the voter are municipal politicians. And this bill makes a lot of changes to how these politicians, or how these people who are candidates, who put themselves up for office—it makes a lot of changes.

I was very encouraged, and I'm going to hold the Minister of Agriculture to this—in his response, he said that this bill is going to hit the road and travel to all corners of Ontario. Well, it should, because—and the member for London West has mentioned it a couple of times—consulting before the draft is written is a good thing, but consulting with the draft is much more important.

When I read that there is some question of whether a volunteer fireman can be a volunteer fireman and campaign as a candidate at the same time, that is a huge issue in my riding, because there was a couple of reeves who would have had to pick. That's something you might not pick up on in Toronto. I talked to the CUPE people today, and they've got a couple of issues with the professional firemen. Quite frankly, I didn't know anything about that issue, because we have very few professional firefighters in my riding. Out of the 26, I think I've got two municipalities with professionals. So that's something that might not get picked up on here.

I'm sure that there's a bunch of other things that maybe didn't get picked up. That's why all bills should travel but, specifically, this one, because it affects people. They might not even know how it impacts them until after it's done. A few of the things that have happened with this government in the last couple of days, changing—people rising up and saying, "Wait, this is wrong," and then backtracking: I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. It would be a lot better if you identified the problems before you announced them. It would be better if you figured out the seniors prescription problem before you announced it. Hopefully, with bills like this, you will actually travel and take the time to do it right.

One thing I have to put on the record with this bill is that most people don't—and I don't blame them for this. People don't really think about the difference between the levels of government; they don't. As we're talking about changing the finance rules for the provincial sector—and we certainly have our disagreements on how the government is proceeding with that. This bill, throwing it into the mix as an issue, muddies the waters. Now, whether that's intentional or not, I don't know, but it does.

The average person out there does not really—when people come to my office and they want something fixed,

they really don't care if it's municipal, provincial or federal. They have a problem; they want it fixed, right? So when you throw this bill in the mix, as that other stuff is floating around, it's going to muddy the waters. Whether it's intentional or not, I don't know. Why I wonder if it could be intentional is—well, look at some budgets. Beer in grocery stores; sell Ontario Hydro. Beer in grocery stores—oh, by the way. Was that intentional? I don't know. I really don't know, but it's the same type of issue.

We've got election finance issues provincially, and we're going to muddy the waters by throwing this in: "See all the good things we're doing municipally." The people outside are not going to recognize the difference. If that's intentional, it's truly scary, and I hope the government will take that very seriously.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: I can assure the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane that, no, it wasn't intentional. But I do want to say that I totally agree with him that people don't care. People don't care who takes care of what. They've just got a problem.

One of the things I advertise is, "If you have a problem, you've got a question, just call." It doesn't matter what it is. We all have to work together and people just need to be served.

I have to respond to something from the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. There was something called the Fewer Politicians Act. Not many of you were here, but there were a few on the other side who were here when that happened. I'm not sure if that would fit into his description of unilateral or undemocratic. It was voted on here, which is part of our democratic process. Thirty of us were just gone.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thirty-one.

Mr. John Fraser: Thirty-one?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thirty-one.

Mr. John Fraser: Thanks for helping me lose track. My train of thought has left the station.

I just wanted to remind him of that. As I said to him earlier, I firmly believe that municipalities are mature levels of government, and I think that this bill is an important bill.

In reference to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane's remarks with regard to travelling the bill, I think we have to recognize how, when we get into committee, we can make the bill better and recognize those things because that's really important, and, in a timely fashion, make sure that we get this legislation passed, as amended, so that it can actually be used in the next municipal cycle.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to comment on my NDP colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I think that he always brings a reasoned argument to the legislative debate, and I very much appreciate that. It allows these

two-minute hits to be that much easier because we stay on focus.

1750

The first thing is the discussion about volunteer firefighters. In my own community, there is a very similar situation. The vast majority of fire protection/suppression occurs through the use of volunteer firefighters. I think it would be a terrible shame if these volunteers—these leaders in our communities—were basically shut out from running for public office, simply because there's an arbitrary rule of a three-month ban. I have issues with that, as well.

I have been elected since 2007. For those of you who were around during the 2007 general election, you will recall that there was a referendum. We had a very public debate and discussion about changes to the electoral system, and the public spoke. I think that call for referendum, that need to make sure that people are hearing all of the debates—pro and con; for and against—needs to happen when you're making these kind of fundamental changes to how we elect our municipal representatives.

I do have concerns that, again, this bill would allow that to proceed without that very important step. To me, that's probably the biggest concern that I have with this piece of legislation. There is an arbitrariness to sitting politicians, who, by their very nature, are going to make it easier for themselves, not for people who are seeking additional office.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise and congratulate the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for the insights that he provided into Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

I have to say that I may be an anomaly in this Legislature—certainly, different from the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane—because my community of London actually passed a municipal resolution supporting the right of municipalities to use a ranked ballot in the next municipal election. So they welcomed that provision of the bill.

The unfortunate thing is that they have not had an opportunity to comment on the other sections of the bill that really raise concerns. We have heard from stakeholder organizations and from legal experts that there is a possibility that the provisions of the bill that deal with third-party advertising and restrictions on third-party advertising could have the potential of silencing individuals, NGOs, charities and community organizations who want to express an opinion on an issue that they are concerned about during the municipal campaign period. We will need to do a lot more analysis and research to understand the implications of those provisions.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane and others in this House have talked about the danger of rushing through legislation when you have a majority Parliament. I myself responded to Bill 132, the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act. I brought in 32 amendments; not a single amendment passed. We know that when the Liberals bring in this legislation, however

flawed it is, with their majority representation, they will just pass it, and that is a loss for democracy in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm pleased to enter the debate again this afternoon. We began a couple of hours ago, and I led off with the government side, chatting about Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

I do want to respond to comments that were made by my colleague the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane when he said that there was a lack of consultation on this. Is he aware that over 3,400 submissions were received on this very issue? We listened to the public, to municipal councils and to their staff across the province. This took place last year, and we heard a lot of feedback on this.

In fact, I reached out to municipal politicians in my riding of Kitchener Centre. I was interested in knowing what my mayor, Berry Vrbanovic, had to say, as well as our regional chair—we have two levels of government there—Ken Seiling. He's the chair in Waterloo region. They both told me that they very much support many of the proposals that are in Bill 181. In particular, they are looking at shortening the election period—rather than having to start on January 1, moving it to May 1. They're looking forward to a shorter campaign period, and I can't say that I blame them. That came from Berry Vrbanovic. Ken Seiling, our chair, also believes that a shortened election period is a great idea. I contacted them myself and I listened to them, and I'm happy to share that information with you, and I encourage all of my colleagues to do the same. Reach out to your local municipal politicians and find out what they think, if you haven't already.

Another issue that they're very concerned about is the low voter turnout in local elections. By looking at some of the changes that we are suggesting, in particular with ranked ballots—this is another way of encouraging more people to vote. This is also favoured by my regional chair and by the mayor in my community.

They are very supportive of many of the other items that we are talking about. Accessibility, voters lists, campaign finances: They're in favour of those changes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has two minutes.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Ottawa South, the member from Dufferin–Caledon, my colleague from London West, and the member from Kitchener Centre.

In response to the member from Kitchener Centre: I didn't criticize the consultation that went on before. What I'm saying is, if you want true consultation on something like this, people have to be able to see what's being proposed, and then they can have an educated discussion on what is being proposed, and then you could make amendments that would make the bill better. But that hasn't been the practice of this government, as far I've seen, because amendment after amendment is wiped out, rejected summarily without discussion—just bang, bang, bang. That's how committee goes: bang, bang, bang. Well, that's not really how good legislation is made.

They're a majority government. They have won the right to govern, but they should have won the right to govern responsibly, and that is what's being missed. If they were truly governing responsibly, at this point they wouldn't have to do all this backtracking; people wouldn't have to get so upset about demonstration schools. Hopefully, the government will realize it with autism and grandfather these people—because you don't get rid of the list by just throwing the people off and saying, "Oh, the list is gone." That's not how it works. Change how you do things—that's fine—but the people who are stuck in the middle should be grandfathered. You can't just eliminate them. That shows that the government hasn't really realized how to govern responsibly.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being three minutes to 6, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
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of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 14 April 2016

Jeudi 14 avril 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 14 April 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 14 avril 2016

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S TRAILS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX SENTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur les sentiers de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When last we discussed the bill, the member for Prince Edward–Hastings had the floor and we were at two minutes. We are now doing further debate. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate this morning on Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts. When this bill was introduced in May 2015, we didn't hear very much about it, but then people started to contact us with their concerns. The concerns were coming from rural Ontario.

We've looked at the bill, and we understand the concerns that people are bringing to us. We don't necessarily agree that the bill brings about the same threats as they may feel, but what really irks me is that the government didn't go through a better consultative process, sitting down with people in rural Ontario, in particular land-owners and snowmobile clubs, to indicate clearly what this bill would and would not do. That's the crux of the problem for me right now in eastern Ontario. The government can say, "It doesn't cause that," but misunderstanding or whatever about the bill has caused people to shut down snowmobile trails throughout eastern Ontario and, in fact, throughout the province because they're not comfortable with what the government is doing here without a proper explanation of just what this bill is intended to do.

We have to go back a little bit to the history of why there is distrust—mistrust I guess would be the word—

from people who populate rural Ontario. If you go back to this government when they got elected, they immediately started to do some things that people threw up their hands and said, "What's this all about?" Church suppers and county fairs were being told they couldn't serve food because they weren't going to pass health regulations—shutting down little things like that or threatening to have the local health units go in and shut down a church supper because they didn't have state-of-the-art sanitation procedures in the basement of St. John's Augsburg church. They just don't have those things. They're not equipped with state-of-the-art food serving equipment.

They had to back off on that because there was such an uproar. But it spoke to the thinking of the government, about how they viewed activities that have gone on for decades, centuries in fact, in rural Ontario, where no one had ever raised an issue that people were going to the church supper and leaving ill. In fact, I think we get more cases of salmonella and food poisoning in city restaurants that don't get up to code than we've ever had at the church supper down in the local parish. But the government felt that they needed to put the pressure on those rural people. There have been various publications that have talked about how this government, more than any government before, would like to see rural Ontario depopulated and force everybody to move to the cities because they really find that supporting rural Ontario has just gotten to be too much of a big deal, too expensive and too cumbersome for them. So why is there distrust out there? It's because of the previous actions of the government.

Let's get to the bill itself. If they wanted to perpetuate that feeling, that's all they need to do: bring in a bill that is not properly consulted, not properly explained. Then those who are naturally, and with good reason, suspicious of the government are going to stand and raise their objections to it.

I know we don't have a lot of time, but the section of the bill that has caused the most consternation is section 12, the section dealing with easements. Before I get too much into it, yesterday I thanked the member for Trinity–Spadina for asking a question about Bill 100 and easements and looking for some clarification around it. I thought it was a golden opportunity for the minister to actually clarify the situation, extend an olive branch of some description to rural Ontario and maybe clearly state that in committee and before we go back for second reading we will put that kind of language in the bill that rural Ontario is looking for that clearly states that any and all easements will and must be voluntary and that no

one can be forced into an easement and verbal agreements cannot ever be made into an easement. Make that clear to the people, and I think you would have given a great deal of comfort to those people in rural Ontario who are concerned about this bill. Sadly, the minister took the opportunity to talk about how great the bill was and that we, on the wrong side of his argument, were just making a lot of noise. That's not how you make the other side feel comfortable that you're trying to get this thing through in a reasonable fashion. He should have answered the question and he should have satisfied the desires and the wants of those who are concerned about the misunderstandings and the bad drafting of this legislation.

What has happened—and I'm hopeful now that winter is finally over, we think—is that the snowmobile trails, whether they were shut down by the landowners that owned the land that they were traversing, are closed anyway because winter is essentially over. Having said that, we've got to make sure that we can give comfort to those landowners so that those trails will be reopened come the fall. Snowmobiling is an integral part of our winter economy. It would be terrible that because of a badly messaged, badly drafted piece of legislation that did not take into account the need to consult properly with all of the requisite parties, we would see a billion-dollar industry in this province cut off at the knees because they can't cross certain properties.

0910

You have to understand that snowmobiling requires the co-operation of those landowners. Those landowners are their greatest partners, but the beneficiaries are all of us: the businesses that exist in rural communities, the hotels, the motels, the gas stations, the restaurants—everybody. Truck dealers: If you've got a \$20,000 or \$15,000 snowmobile, you've got to buy a trailer for it, and you're going to have to have a good truck to pull it with. So, what happens to car dealers across the province without snowmobiling? If you don't own a snowmobile, you don't need that big truck to pull it around halfway across the province so you can get onto a good trail and you get there and you find the sign, "Closed because Michael Coteau didn't talk to us." That's not what we want to see.

You need to clarify this. You need to clarify this absolutely, and without any question or doubt, so that the people in rural Ontario can comfortably say to those good people who operate snowmobiles and contribute so much to our economy and have been wonderful neighbours for all of our lives, "My trails are open for business to you." What we need from Minister Coteau is some clarity that says to everybody that it isn't just about the trails here and there; it's also about the trails through rural Ontario, the snowmobile trails, that mean so much to us.

There are some good components to this bill that I think are positive for rural landowners. For rural landowners there are some positive components to this bill. The increased fines for trespassing: That says to rural landowners, "We want to protect your property in a way that it wasn't protected before." That's good. But we

should be talking about that; we shouldn't be talking about the fact that people are losing access to trails in rural Ontario because the minister didn't do his homework. We should be talking about the good parts of the bill and not wondering if we are going to shut down an industry that, my god, we all depend on. I say to my friend from Peterborough, do we need another industry shut down in this province? The answer is no. So let's stand together. Let's stand together with the people in rural Ontario—the landowners, the snowmobilers—and say: Ontario is open for business and this bill is going to be clarified to make sure that happens.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was a pleasure to address this bill this morning. I hope that when this bill gets to committee the minister will do the right thing and make sure that the attitude that rural Ontario is not respected by this government has a chance—I'll give the government a chance to improve your relationship with rural Ontario. Show them that you respect them and that you're interested in their views.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. If I wasn't awake, I am now.

Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for that roaring speech on Bill 100. You know, a lot of people have actually been up on their feet to talk about this bill. I think it's clear that the bill is kind of vague in its intent. The bill really was about an easement issue, but in fact the bill in its intent really talks about increasing awareness, encouraging use of, enhancing the trail experience, protecting trails for today's generation and future generations, and recognizing the contribution that trails make to the quality of life in Ontario, when the bill should have been more about the actual private access to trails in the province. There should have been more consultation with those people who own land and actually allow people to connect to snowmobile trails on their property, and unfortunately that wasn't done.

So once again, in this piece of legislation, not enough consultation on the front end, and we know that at the back end there will be an enforcement problem; there always is. We hear about that with every piece of legislation that gets passed here. We continue to put in legislation, but we don't actually put in the appropriate enforcement at the end of the day. So I hope that when the bill gets to committee, we can address not only the amendments we need to make for the people who will allow access easements, but as well the enforcement piece for those people who may be violating pieces of the legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. I think you were there when we left yesterday, right? Did you go home?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I like it here.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: You like it there. Good.

Speaker, it's a pleasure to make a couple of comments on the comments by the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, but I must ask first: Where do you get those pills? I just don't have the stamina first thing in the morning. If you could help us, it would be great. I know he was at the lung caucus this morning, and I wonder if it was the breakfast. I know that he ate it pretty quickly.

Speaker, let me focus a little bit on the mechanism for easements that the member talked about. I'm going to read this, because I want to make sure I get it right: "An easement under the proposed act would, if passed, be an agreement between a willing landowner and an eligible body that grants the eligible body access to the owner's land for trail-related activities or purposes."

I think that's fairly clear. The two parties have to come together. If the landowner says, "No, you're not bringing your snowmobile across my land" or "you're not walking across my land, or your four-wheeler," I think that's fairly clear.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: He has to have rights.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: They've got to have rights to do that. It's an agreement, and I think we have to respect that.

Speaker, trails have an important function in our economy. Living in rural Ontario in Northumberland county, I know there are a number of trails, and there are some that create some issues like those we are trying to undo here.

I think we need to be somewhat cautious about how we message this—address it. Can we do better? Maybe we could look at that, for sure, through committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I don't think anybody here is terribly surprised to hear that there isn't a lot of snowmobiling in my riding of Thornhill. But it doesn't mean that people don't want to get out into the country and access our fantastic trail system in Ontario.

I have to say that in Montreal I used to go very often on the weekend with my family to the area of Oka. I think that people here have heard of Oka cheese. There's a monastery that started Oka cheese that is so famous. Mostly, it was a national park, but I never thought, when in Montreal doing trails, "Is this private land, or is this some kind of national park?" Montreal has an incredible system.

It doesn't take long to get into the country in Montreal, because it's an island and things are sort of constrained. We do hear a lot about snowmobiling. The reality is that these trails are used for so much more. They're used for biking, hiking and cross-country skiing. I mostly use the trails for cross-country skiing, I have to admit.

We have to understand that people are not going to allow total strangers to come on their land, out of the goodness of their heart, to participate in all kinds of winter or summer sports that may involve heavy machinery or other equipment. They may have emergencies. They have to maintain the trails. They're not going to allow that to happen without absolute assurances they're not giving up something of value: either access to their own

land or providing guaranteed easements in the future or somehow devaluing their own property.

I think the whole reason we're here in the Legislature is to ensure that people's needs are met and that their property is respected. I think that what we are hearing from so many people on this side of the House is that there are concerns with this bill. The government had the opportunity to address the concerns, and for some reason the government chose not to. That makes people very nervous.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would say that I agree with lots of what the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke had to say. I represent a northern riding. I live on a lake. There are major snowmobile trails right in front of my house. We have the Walden snowmobile club, the Sudbury snowmobile club, the Espanola snowmobile club, the Massey—there are trails all over. Come and use the trails in Nickel Belt. We have beautiful, beautiful Ski-Doo trails, some of them four lanes, two lanes this way and two lanes that way. They're beautiful.

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But now some of them are closed, not because of a lack of snow but because of this bill. Some of the snowmobile clubs have written to me and said that some landowners had given permission to go on their lands forever. You see, Speaker, in the summer the farmers don't want you a mile around their field, but in the winter, when there's four feet of snow on top of it, they're quite okay. If you stay within the trails, they let you go. An industry that took a long time to build—and I want a shout-out to my predecessor, Shelley Martel, who was instrumental in making sure that the trail system as we know it in the north was developed—is now at risk of collapsing. You only have to have one piece taken out of the trail and then you're doomed: This entire trail from beginning to end has to close, with everything that comes with it.

The government keeps saying it's not going to happen, but you know what? Perception is reality. The perception of those people is that they will have to now hire a lawyer to make sure that the permission that they give is not going to be detrimental to their farm and to their land. This has to be addressed. It's not to be addressed by telling them that they're wrong; it's by talking to the people of northern Ontario. Try it. It's worth it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has two minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I want to thank the members from Welland, Northumberland–Quinte West, Thornhill and Nickel Belt for their comments. I must say, the member for Nickel Belt summed it up extremely well. That is how we want to close, as well.

These people didn't start closing trails to snowmobilers because they had a bad dream one night and woke up and decided it would be a good idea to shut the trails. Something came to their attention—across their desk, so to speak—that scared them. It was Bill 100. And regardless of what the government says about how

wonderful Bill 100 is, one of the side effects—the unforeseen circumstances, perhaps—was that landowners believed that this constituted a threat to their property rights. If you feel that it's your responsibility as a government to make sure that communications are clear, then you have to do something to remedy that. Because the consequence is, as the member from Nickel Belt said, that the trails closed, not because of the climate or weather or lack of snow; they closed because people reacted to what they saw in Bill 100.

It only stands to reason, then, that it is incumbent upon the government to satisfy that concern, to the extent that it can be satisfied, and I think it can, if the minister would clarify, when he has the opportunity to do that, that these easements have to be absolutely—without any question—voluntary. You cannot be forced into one; verbal contracts do not constitute easements. All of those things need to be clarified, so that when this bill comes back to the House from committee, should it pass second reading—but the government has the majority; I'm sure that it's going to—that has to be cleared up. We want those trails open next winter. It's vital to us here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? Oh, the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you very much, Speaker, for noticing me. I appreciate it.

It's great to rise this morning in the House on the Supporting—

Mr. Tim Hudak: You've got to work on your tan.

Mr. Grant Crack: I haven't gone away yet—Supporting Ontario Trails Act, 2015. If it was passed, it would improve and sustain Ontario's urban, suburban, rural and remote land and water trails. It would help the trails community more effectively develop, operate and promote trails while enhancing the trail experience for all trail users.

The proposed act would strengthen Ontario's trails system by enabling the government to:

- (1) better manage trail activity and protect public land and property by modernizing stewardship, compliance and enforcement tools;
- (2) clarify landowner responsibilities for trails running through their land;
- (3) strengthen the consequences of trespassing on private and agricultural land; and
- (4) increase the amount that landowners could recover for damages caused by trespassers.

During second reading debate, we heard members of the opposition and we heard members of the third party expressing their support for Bill 100. I'd like to quote a couple of the members, Speaker. One of them is the really good member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek; perhaps you know him. He said, “The NDP supports the objectives of the bill.... It is good that this bill provides the trails community with improved and expanded tools to develop, operate and promote trails.”

What a great quote. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound said he “will support this bill in principle because of a number of reasons.”

The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka said, “I think there are some benefits to this bill, which have been largely overshadowed by the concerns with the easement section.... There's a change in the limit on fines for trespassers on private property. It goes from \$2,000 to \$10,000. That's more protection for private property owners. There's a reduction in liability, and clarification of liability, for landowners. That's also a positive that is in this bill.”

Speaker, the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington: “The Liberal government has actually introduced a bill that is beneficial and helps rural Ontario. It promotes and improves property rights in Ontario. This is the first bill I have seen from this Liberal government that actually helps and promotes property rights. I'd like to take a few moments to tell people why. I do understand that it is as if the world had been turned upside down by this Liberal government and Bill 100. People don't know what to make of it.”

Speaker, we allowed, as a government—we enjoyed the number of hours of debate so far. We reached 6.5 hours of debate. And we've had more debate than that. We continue to debate it, and we've seen nearly 10 hours of debate to this point. According to my count, we've had nearly half of the members of this Legislature speak to this bill.

There's been considerable debate on this bill and we've heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives. Unfortunately, much of the debate has been repeating points already made by other members. It's clear there's support on all sides for this bill, but members on the other side would like to see some amendments. It's time for this bill to be put to a vote for second reading and hopefully be referred to committee, where the important work takes place.

In committee, that's where members of all parties will hear from stakeholders who have an interest in this bill. Members of the public will be able to provide input into this important bill. In committee, members will have the opportunity to move amendments to strengthen the bill, and this House can move on to debate other matters.

There are a number of pieces of important legislation already introduced which the government would like to debate and move through the legislative process. We have Bill 119, the Health Information Protection Act; Bill 135, the Energy Statute Law Amendment Act; Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act; and Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

Mr. Speaker, we would like to spend some time debating some of those other important pieces of legislation currently before the House, but we can't until Bill 100 is referred to committee for further review. As the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, who spoke earlier, said, he'd like to see this go to committee. Well, as a result, I would move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to first thank the member for mentioning me in his submission. Thanks so much. It was nice of him to allow us to talk for 10 hours.

Mr. Crack has moved that the question now be put. I'm satisfied that we have a benchmark and I'm satisfied there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a "no."

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

This will be voted on after question period.

Vote deferred.

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ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS CONCERNANT LES SERVICES FINANCIERS DE RECHANGE

Mr. Orazietti moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services / Projet de loi 156, Loi modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Mr. Orazietti.

Hon. David Orazietti: I'll be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Newmarket-Aurora.

This is an important piece of legislation. There has been much discussion about this. From the time when the federal government downloaded responsibility for payday loans and other financial services, the province has stepped up with legislation. My colleague and predecessor in this ministry, Minister Ted McMeekin, first introduced the Payday Loans Act in 2008 in our government. Since then, we have been building on the appropriate regulations and legislative requirements that help to protect vulnerable consumers in the province of Ontario.

I want to make a couple of introductory comments first, before I get into the key issues of the legislation. Back to the point that I was making, there has been considerable commentary on this in various media outlets across the province, in Windsor and Hamilton and Ottawa, and here in Toronto as well. I have spoken to a number of councillors in the province with respect to this issue, including Matthew Green in Hamilton, who has been active on this issue. I know there are other councillors that my staff have also spoken with who want to see better regulations to support vulnerable consumers in their respective communities.

I can also say that with respect to our ministry, our data show that complaints with respect to alternative financial services—payday lending and the like—have been the number one complaint or inquiry in our ministry. In some years, that's meant well over a thousand calls or complaints with respect to this particular issue. So it is an issue that has significant concern in Ontario, an issue that Ontarians do want addressed.

There are over 800 licensed payday lenders in the province of Ontario today. With respect to this piece of legislation, approximately a thousand Ontarians were consulted in the development of it. As well, obviously, all Ontarians have an opportunity to provide input into legislation that's being made by the province. Our consultations took us to Hamilton, to Owen Sound, to Guelph, to Ottawa, to Windsor. So this has not been a piece of legislation that has been developed in isolation or in a bubble, so to speak. It has been one that has been sounded well with communities across the province and with many different stakeholders.

I'm going to make some comments with respect to the bill and the importance of passing this legislation. The bill aims to better protect financially insecure Ontarians with limited access to traditional credit by amending legislation to protect consumers who use financial services other than banks and credit unions. If passed, this legislation would also protect consumers with debts in collection. Financial security is a broad issue that our government is addressing in partnership with all levels of government, community agencies and the private sector.

Ontario has had a long history of protecting consumers in debt and those who use alternative financial services. The Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act sets rules for when and how collection agencies can contact consumers with debts in collection. The Consumer Protection Act sets rules for credit agreements and leasing. And the Payday Loans Act capped the cost of borrowing and protected payday loan borrowers from certain practices.

Consumers who use these services and consumers with debts in collection are part of a broad spectrum. They may be employed full-time or they may be on a fixed income. They may be newcomers to Ontario or have lived in Ontario all of their lives. They may be facing financial difficulties for the first time or have been in debt for many years.

Speaker, what consumers of alternative financial services and those with debts in collection have in common is limited financial assets, incomes that can fall short of expenses and few options for credit. We have heard from a wide range of stakeholders that alternative financial services are an important source of credit during emergencies to avoid a bounced cheque, a late payment or an overdraft charge. However, these services also come with a high price, and that cost can become a new financial burden for some consumers.

It's our responsibility to ensure that the options for financially vulnerable consumers help to break the cycle of debt. Our government is proud of the fact that legislation is in place to protect these consumers, yet we all know that today's marketplace is innovative and constantly changing. As new alternative financial services slowly enter the market, we must be vigilant and respond to those changes. We must make sure that consumers have the information and resources they need to make the right decision for themselves.

It was also important to ask consumers and other stakeholders what they thought, and so we did. We con-

sulted with a payday lending panel, which provided advice on how to improve payday loans. I have already referenced, Speaker, the locations that we have travelled to in the province to undertake these consultations. We wanted to ensure that the ever-changing alternative financial services market can be addressed and, as well, the importance of debt collection more generally.

We responded by developing broader proposals to strengthen consumer financial protection in the province. We consulted with consumers, community agencies, consumer advocates, the debt collection industry and the alternative financial services industry. When Ontarians tell us there are areas we can improve on, it's imperative that we take steps to do so.

Today our government is focused on the path forward. The legislation before the House for second reading today, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, proposes to help consumers using alternative financial services and consumers with debts in collection. If passed, it will strengthen protections in order to address a wide range of alternative financial services and debt collection issues.

With regard to cheque cashing services, alternative financial service providers typically cash cheques for a flat fee of \$3 plus 3% of the face value of the cheque. With repeat use, this quickly adds up and can eat away at a family's bottom line. Our proposed law would ensure that consumers are given the information they need when cashing government cheques. It would also allow for limits to be set on the cost of cashing a government-issued cheque. This would help ensure that recipients of government-issued cheques receive the intended value.

With respect to rent-to-own services, we are also proposing improvements to the rules surrounding rent-to-own services in Ontario. Consumers are likely to choose rent-to-own when they cannot afford to purchase the product outright and have limited options to borrow the funds. Through these services, customers can rent furniture, electronics and appliances and, at some point in the agreement, purchase them outright. Short term, the weekly or monthly payments appear low, but long term, consumers typically pay far more for the item than if they would have purchased it outright.

If passed, this legislation would enable further protection of consumers by providing that important information about rent-to-own services to potential customers, giving customers a grace period for late payments, and establishing consumer rights to reinstate a terminated lease agreement and thereby avoid additional penalties. Changes such as these would make us leaders in Canada when it comes to protecting consumers using rent-to-own services.

With regard to instalment loans, we're proposing to improve regulations surrounding credit agreements by addressing potential risks to consumers using high-cost instalment loans. Instalment loans are any loan that has a set number of scheduled payments. High-cost instalment loans typically offered by alternative financial service providers have grown in use in recent years. According

to a large bankruptcy trustee, the number of insolvencies involving these instalment loans grew five times in just two years.

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Speaker, when we consulted, we heard that consumers can find the cost of these loans confusing and unexpectedly expensive, and that some consumers are offered services that they don't need and pressured into borrowing again and again. With this legislation, we are proposing to allow for rules to address these issues.

First, the bill would allow us to require the lender to assess if the borrower can afford the loan, and share that assessment with the borrower. Consumers need to know how that loan will affect their financial situation.

Second, if passed, this bill would allow for the control over the cost of fees not included in the cost of borrowing, such as optional insurance which can be very costly to a consumer.

Third, we are proposing to prevent lenders from contacting consumers for the purpose of offering to refinance those same loans. Refinancing an instalment loan can keep consumers in debt longer. Ontario's consumers deserve the opportunity to consider whether or not they want or need to refinance a loan themselves. These proposed changes will better protect Ontarians in the growing high-cost loan instalment market.

Speaker, with regard to debt collection services, Ontario is proud to have strong rules in place for consumers who have debts that have progressed to collection. We propose to make existing rules for debt collection even stronger. The practices of debt-collection agencies account for the highest number of telephone calls and inquiries received by Consumer Protection Ontario. We're proposing to expand existing rules against unfair and harmful collection practices and have them apply to collection agencies and creditors that have purchased overdue debts. We would also allow for a requirement that more information be provided to consumers as part of the collection process.

These are just a few ways in which Bill 156 would help vulnerable individuals and families in Ontario. Our actions would protect consumers from financial harm and would help ensure they receive better information and guidance so they can make informed decisions. If passed, this legislation would protect consumers from both abusive debt-collection practices and unlicensed lenders in the payday loan industry.

With regard to payday loans, Speaker: This brings us to a topic that led to our broader review of strengthening consumer financial protection, specifically payday loans. When we introduced the Payday Loans Act in 2008, we did so to protect Ontarians using these services. We set rules to inform borrowers, to prohibit payday loans from being rolled over, and to limit the cost of a payday loan. Since the act took effect in 2009, we have taken enforcement action to correct non-compliance and have monitored the payday loan lending market. We know we can do more.

Speaker, payday lending is a widely used service. In Ontario in 2014, approximately 400,000 households used

a payday loan. This is three times the number using payday loans as compared to 2009, and the typical payday loan borrower uses the service repeatedly. The average payday loan user in Ontario enters into about eight agreements a year with an average loan size of approximately \$460. That means that the average payday loan user ends up paying approximately \$770 in costs per year.

We know that payday loan borrowers tend to have lower incomes and are likely to be more financially insecure. Despite clearly displayed costs and the common practice of repeat borrowing, only one third of borrowers of payday loans know that their payday loan is the most expensive way to borrow money. In fact, less than 10% of consumers understand exactly how expensive payday loans are, so we're taking action to ensure Ontario's payday loan users are better informed and better protected.

Speaker, the law before us today would, if passed, enhance Ontario's already strong Payday Loans Act. For example, once a payday loan is paid back, payday lenders would need to wait a week before they entered into a new payday loan agreement with the borrower. This would give borrowers some time to determine whether or not there are less expensive options available to them.

We're also proposing to strengthen protection for repeat borrowers. We would do this by allowing rules to be made that would give certain repeat borrowers more time to repay their debts.

It's clear that payday borrowers would benefit from having more information about available options. For this reason, we are proposing rules that would help consumers learn about various credit counselling services. We also propose expanded rules on the type of information that would be required to be provided to borrowers and how this information is given to them.

In addition, we would strengthen our ability to enforce the act by allowing inspections of unlicensed lenders and loan brokers. The purpose of the Payday Loans Act is to protect borrowers, and we want to make sure that we have the tools in place to do so.

Speaker, we have much to be proud of when it comes to protecting consumers in the marketplace. We now have an opportunity and an obligation to do more.

We've consulted with businesses, consumers and community agencies. We have sought the expertise of other jurisdictions across the country, the continent and overseas.

We understand that alternative financial services are seen as an important way to address financial needs in the absence of other services or options for some borrowers. We know that partners outside of government, such as traditional financial institutions and community agencies, are working hard to provide other options, and we applaud their work.

Addressing the broader issues of financial security is a complex task, and it takes time. But we have the opportunity to strengthen protections for financially insecure consumers now. Our responsibility is to protect those who depend on financial services that fall outside mainstream banks and credit unions.

Speaker, I know how important this issue is to many people who have contacted our ministry and to people who raised this issue with me in my riding. I know how important this is to members of this Legislature who have come to me on this particular issue. Many consumers, vulnerable consumers in particular, and community agencies have raised this issue with their MPPs. This is clearly not a partisan issue. I know that we all want to ensure that vulnerable consumers in Ontario have the protection that they need, regardless of where they live. I hope all members of the Legislature will strongly support this legislation and help to move it forward.

We know that the traditional form of lending and borrowing in this province is difficult to access, especially for vulnerable and needy consumers. We know that the industry continues to evolve and continues to invent new products, new criteria and new ways to capture additional profits in their sector while providing a service. Some community organizations and community activist groups have said that this particular sector is important to regulate. But it is also important that we understand that there needs to be available credit provided to individuals in emergency circumstances and in emergency situations when someone needs, for example, to get some money for, perhaps, a prescription for their child. We know that there are these types of situations out there.

We have a few choices. We could say that we would completely ban payday lending in the province of Ontario, and the implications of doing that would be that certain individuals would not have access to credit that they needed.

We can look at a more prudent, and I believe a more practical, approach to this, which is to ensure that the rules and the environment that are in place in Ontario help to protect vulnerable consumers and create an environment where people are being informed, where they have the information they need and they know what they're getting into when they borrow from a payday lender in the province. That gives people the best information and the best protection they possibly can have.

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I believe in the legislation that we're moving forward because it will take steps to help protect vulnerable consumers. I'm looking forward to the discussions at committee and I'm looking forward to hearing the feedback from members in the Legislature on this particular issue.

I've had several conversations with my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing with regard to the locations of payday lending stores and the clustering of these stores in municipalities. I know that municipal councillors are concerned with the location of the stores, the clustering, as well, and, under the Municipal Act, about whether or not there can be provisions made to limit the distances by where they are located. There are other examples of other types of businesses in this province that need to comply with those types of rules.

So I am supportive of that and I am supportive of the work that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing is doing in that regard. I am sensitive to the concerns of

municipalities when they are talking about ensuring that they have the tools that they need to help protect consumers and to look at ways in which the location and the density of these particular retail outlets are placed in communities.

We know in other provinces they're having the same discussion around this issue. This is not an issue that is easily solved. We're talking about individuals who are often in significant need, who are vulnerable and who have challenges with respect to credit and may have in some cases limited knowledge and understanding of the environment that they're getting into when they take up a payday loan.

Again, I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to move this legislation forward with second reading. I'm looking forward to hearing the comments from my colleagues. I'm going to turn the floor over to my colleague the parliamentary assistant and the MPP for Newmarket–Aurora, who is very concerned about this issue as well and who is a strong advocate for vulnerable consumers in his riding, and we'll continue the debate. Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Chris Ballard: As we heard today, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services has introduced second reading of Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016. As the minister indicated, alternative financial services include an array of financial services offered outside of traditional banks and credit unions. They include payday loans, cheque cashing and rent-to-own services.

This important law proposes to amend existing legislation to protect consumers who use alternative financial services providers; that is, providers other than banks and credit unions. We have consulted widely before bringing forward the legislation before you today. We spoke with community agencies, consumer advocates, credit counsellors, debt collectors, municipalities, credit unions, the banking sector, the alternative financial services sector, including payday loan lenders, the financial services industry and consumers.

From those consultations, we know that some people do not have access to a lower-cost source of credit when they have urgent financial obligations, when their income falls short of expenses or they have limited financial assets. We also know that they need to have access to these alternative financial services so they can meet their urgent obligations. These urgent financial obligations include paying the rent, paying bills, buying groceries and paying for unexpected expenses such as car repairs. We also heard alternative sources of credit can be harmful to consumers by putting them further into a cycle of debt and financial hardship.

We explored further. We established a panel with representatives from community agencies, consumer advocates, credit counsellors and the payday loans industry. The panel did its own extensive research before recommending a number of ways to strengthen payday lending

in Ontario. Their findings and recommendations were posted on the Regulatory Registry for the public to share their views on payday loans. The message to the government was clear. That message was that the government can do more to protect users of alternative financial services, and specifically users of payday loans.

The ministry also held focus groups with payday loan users that year. Many borrowers considered borrowing from family, accessing loans or tapping their credit card before choosing to use payday loans. They told us they chose payday loans because at the end of the day, these loans were easy and available. They are also an important source of credit for many people in this province. In the absence of access to lower-cost credit, they want to see payday loans continue to be made available in the marketplace, and they asked us to consider changes that would strengthen the protections that already exist for payday loans in our province.

Some of the things people asked us to consider are longer terms and lower costs, a reduced cost of repaying the loan earlier, and the option to pay back loans in instalments.

We explored this further. We wanted to make sure that we got it right. Last year, ministry staff visited six communities across Ontario. They spoke with municipalities, agencies and consumers on topics including rent-to-own, instalment loans, payday loans, cheque-cashing, remittances, and debt-collection practices.

During these discussions, payday loans emerged as a popular focus of conversation. Stakeholders told us that stricter regulations were needed for payday loans and rent-to-own services.

Mr. Speaker, it became clear to us that the marketplace for alternative financial services is changing and that those in the marketplace and those using the services had expectations they wanted us to meet.

Our government decided that it was important to expand the scope of our new proposed legislation. Strengthened protections for payday loan users are an important part of this new proposed law.

But we propose to include the broader alternative financial services marketplace. The proposed law includes provisions related to cashing of government cheques, rent-to-own services, instalment loans and protection of consumers who have debts in collections. Ontarians should have choice when it comes to their finances, and that includes the opportunity to access credit and other financial services.

Mr. Speaker, we have listened to the people of this province. We have sought the expertise of other jurisdictions across the country, continent and overseas. We are making an ongoing effort to explore all of the options available to us to strengthen protections for consumers from the risks of using alternative financial services.

In speaking with consumers and the industry, it is clear that alternative financial services can be an important way for many people in our province to meet their financial obligations in the absence of low-cost alternatives to short-term credit. We understand that alternative finan-

cial services are seen as an important way to address financial needs in the absence of other options.

We know that partners outside of government, such as traditional financial institutions and community agencies, are working hard to provide other options, and we applaud their work.

We are also working with municipalities across Ontario. We know some municipalities are taking steps to limit the number and regulate the locations of payday loan and cheque-cashing outlets in their communities. In community meetings and consultation feedback, we heard concerns about how high concentrations of payday lenders affect local neighbourhoods. We heard the desire for more control of where payday lenders operate, in order to address community-level impacts. We're working with our municipal partners at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to explore how we can work together to address their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, we have much to be proud of when it comes to protecting consumers in the marketplace. We have taken the time to listen to the people of our province. We have consulted businesses, consumers and other interested parties such as community agencies. We have done our due diligence.

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We understand that alternative financial services are seen as an important way to address financial needs in the absence of other options. Our goal is to take every opportunity we can to strengthen protections for financially insecure consumers. To build a stronger foundation of consumer protection for the people in our province, Mr. Speaker and honourable colleagues, I invite you to support our Minister of Government and Consumer Services as we work to give people in our province the stronger protection they have asked for and they deserve.

Mr. Speaker, just to carry on and to provide a bit more background: As we said, there is a bit of historical context to the second reading of this bill. As the minister noted earlier, our government is committed to protecting consumers. That includes protecting Ontarians from a cycle of debt. In fact, in 2013, the ministry committed to review the payday loan legislation. That review was expanded to include other types of high-cost alternative financial services, such as instalment loans, cheque cashing and rent-to-own services, as well as debt collection. Broader public consultation informed our approach to strengthening protections for consumers of alternative financial services and those who are struggling with debt.

The proposed bill would protect consumers in several important ways. We've heard the minister outline a number of them, and I've touched on a number of them myself.

Consumers with debt in collections would benefit from debt collection rules that apply more broadly, including applying them to debt purchasers. Consumers cashing government cheques at alternative financial service providers would have more information and may benefit from a cap on the rate of cheque-cashing services. Consumers using rent-to-own services would benefit

from a grace period for late payment and a right to reinstate the agreement under certain circumstances. Consumers using instalment loans would benefit from cost control of certain fees, such as optional insurance. Consumers of payday loans would have to wait seven days between payday loans, giving them more time to consider their options. Finally, before I wrap up, those who borrow repeatedly would have a longer repayment period in certain circumstances.

Again, I would urge my colleagues in the House to support this bill, Bill 156, the Alternative Financial Services Statute Law Amendment Act, 2015, as we move it through the House. I thank you for your time and attention.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? Questions and comments? No questions and comments.

Back to either the minister or the member for a two-minute response.

Further debate, then, if there are no questions and comments. Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I'm just waiting for it to go around.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Too late. You missed the boat. Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's an honour to get up and speak to Bill 156, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to financial services. This bill was first introduced back in December of 2015, so apparently it wasn't too important to the government, because it has taken months to actually bring it back.

Anyway, the bill amends the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act, the Consumer Protection Act and the Payday Loans Act and expands the regulation-making powers in each act. There are some significant amendments.

Now, I know that particularly the payday loan issue is a huge problem in many of our communities. We have constituents who come into our office day in and day out who complain about the fact that they perhaps can't open an account at a bank or at a credit union because either they don't have identification, they don't have an address or they just can't afford to have a bank account, because in some of the banks you need to pay as much as \$25 a month. Potentially, the lowest bank account is \$7.50 to \$10 a month.

Interjection.

Ms. Cindy Forster: The whip brought something to my attention that I should—Mr. Speaker, I'm going to stand down the lead for the caucus.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I heard you. The member from Welland has asked to stand down the lead. Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Further debate? The member from Welland again.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker.

I was speaking about the fact that there are many people who live in poverty in our communities who don't

have the ability to open a bank account or open an account at a credit union. Even at credit unions, although you don't necessarily pay a fee for banking in some situations, you have to have shares in that credit union and you have to come up with some form of money to be able to do that. Certainly in banks there are considerable banking fees that some people just can't afford to pay. Lots of times, it's because they're homeless. They don't have a permanent address; they're perhaps living in a shelter. So when these people are on ODSP or Ontario Works and get their cheques, their only option is to go to one of these payday loan companies to get their cheque cashed. Then they get sucked into that system because they don't have enough money to live.

Somebody on Ontario Works who is single is getting just over \$600 a month. The average rent, for example, in my community is probably \$700 or \$800 a month. Here in the city of Toronto, it can be as much as \$1,200 to \$1,800 a month. So for people who are living on the edge like that, their only option is to go and perhaps borrow money from payday lenders. So then they get into that vortex where they end up paying more than they're even getting from Ontario Works or from, perhaps, some minimum wage employment that they have.

The bill also speaks to amending the Collection and Debt Settlement Services Act. The bill amends the act to permit administrative penalties to be imposed against a person who has contravened or is contravening a prescribed provision of the act. It establishes rules respecting the making of an order imposing an administrative penalty, the appeal of such orders, the enforcement of such orders and related matters.

I can tell you that over the last five years I've had a number of people who have come into my office, who have entered into agreements with these debt settlement offices. We have a number of them in my riding. At the end of the day, you could end up paying as much as—I remember one particular constituent. It was \$1,500 or \$1,600 that they were trying to consolidate debt on. They paid a huge fee to the debt consolidation office and, at the end of the day, they didn't get any results. Here are people who are in financial difficulty already, to start with, trying to consolidate some debts so they don't have to claim bankruptcy, who end up paying huge fees to the people who work in the debt consolidation agencies who don't get them any positive outcomes.

I think there needs to be something done in that regard as well, as to how much fees they can charge, so that people who are trying to be upstanding citizens in our communities, who perhaps find themselves unable to pay their bills through no fault of their own, because they've been off sick from work and they don't have any sick pay, or they've been injured and they are waiting for their compensation to come through—there has to be some clearer rules around the fees and how that can address the needs of constituents in our ridings.

1010

The third part of the act is consumer protection. The bill adds a new part to that bill regarding the cashing of

government cheques. The new part provides for a limit on the fee that may be imposed for cashing that government cheque. A supplier who cashes a government cheque for a consumer must also provide the consumer with a statement setting out prescribed information with respect to the cashing of the cheque. I spoke about that briefly, about the fact that many people can't open bank accounts.

I think that we should, in some way, try and address the fact that if people have government cheques, they should be able to cash them at a bank. They should be able to cash them at a credit union. I don't see this necessarily being addressed in this particular bill. Hopefully, when we get to committee, there will be some way to put forward an amendment that will actually deal with that.

We hear about this issue a lot. I know the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton actually talks about this quite often when we're here in the Legislature. I know that many new immigrants, perhaps refugees who are settling in this country, get sucked into this system of actually going to these payday loan companies. At the end of the day, they have less money in their pocket to support their families, but they find that that's the only option that they have.

I've even had people in my own family who have found themselves in hard times, people who perhaps don't want to go to their family and let them know that they're having financial problems. Instead of doing that, they'll go off and enter into some kind of relationship with these agencies. At the end of the day, they find themselves in worse financial shape than they were to start with.

The bill looks like it's got a fair number of amendments. Under the payday loan section, it looks like the bill will amend the restrictions respecting concurrent or replacement payday loan agreements, and respecting the making of more than one payday loan between the same borrower and different lenders.

The bill will also permit the registrar to conduct inspections if he or she has reasonable grounds to believe that a person or an entity is acting as a lender or a loan broker while not licensed. I'm sure that there are agencies out there that aren't licensed. I know that there is probably no enforcement, or very limited enforcement, with respect to these particular financial institutions.

There certainly needs to be more. Regardless of the amendments that get made, and I talked about this on the bill we were discussing earlier today, there needs to be enforcement, right? At the end of the day, we can put in as much legislation as we want, but if we're not enforcing that legislation, then it is problematic.

We know that in many areas of government where we have legislation—I'll take the Employment Standards Act, for example, Speaker, because that's my critic area. We hear from thousands of people each year that the Employment Standards Act isn't enforced, so people aren't getting their regular pay, let alone their overtime pay. They're perhaps not being paid for statutory holidays that they are entitled to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thanks to the member from Welland. It's 10:15 and this will continue at another time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: First, I want to welcome my friend from my constituency of Thornhill, Willem Hart, who is here today. He had breakfast with me and the mayor of Tel Aviv, Ron Huldai, who unfortunately had to leave.

There are many people here from the Yad Vashem foundation, and we're going to be having statements on that later on.

Hon. Jeff Leal: In the members' east gallery today, I'd like to welcome Peter and Elizabeth Peeters, who won an auction in the riding of Peterborough to have a lunch with their MPP.

I would also like to announce today, Mr. Speaker, that a former member of my staff, Stewart, and his wife Jessica just welcomed their first baby, Bryce Andrew Skinner, into the world. We want to give them congratulations.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased to introduce champions of demonstration schools Julie Clarke, Cody Clarke, Janet Marriage, Carissa Macaulay, Wendy Haggitt, Dean Ducharme and Tressa Ducharme. They made the trek from Huron county today, and I welcome them.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to welcome the mother of page captain Joshua Kim. Tina Chan-Kim is in the east members' gallery.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure today to welcome some residents from the city of Ottawa who are here today in support of demonstration schools: Stephanie Grenon, Kevin Van Dyk, Jennifer Pike, Lila-Rosa Frankie, Liz Rosamond and Tyler Cunningham. I welcome them to Queen's Park, and I'm so sorry they had to come here from five hours away.

Ms. Soo Wong: I want to welcome two guests of mine from Scarborough–Agincourt: page captain Aarbi Krishnakumar's mother, Sandy, as well as her brother, Mandaran. They are here in the east gallery.

I also want to welcome my constituents from Scarborough–Agincourt who are sitting in the west visitors' gallery: Denis Lanoue and his wife. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to welcome to the Legislature today Ruth and Patrick Bourachot from my riding. They are here representing their son Nathaniel. The issue, of course, is provincial and demonstration schools.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Joining us here today in the east members' gallery is Tim West, a former TIAO mem-

ber and one of the early supporters of Bill 100. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I am pleased to be able to introduce Ann and Harold Wall, constituents of mine who are here to show their concern over the direction this government is taking—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me: Introductions only, please.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: It is my pleasure to welcome community leader Sarbjit Deol. Along with him is a religious leader from India, Baba Lakha Singh, who is the chairman of Vishav Dharm Sewa Shanti Mission; Rakshpal Singh Sangha; Dharminder Singh; Kulwinder Toor; and Paramjit Deol. They are in the east members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Speaker, I want to introduce to you, and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly, constituents from my riding in Leeds–Grenville who have children at the Sagonaska school in Belleville: Sherry Convery, Lesley and Michael Lehman, and Kortney Jensen. I'd ask the members to give them our traditional warm welcome here in the Legislature.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to welcome families, education workers and community supporters from across Ontario who are here today in order to be here for my debate over the motion to save the provincial and demonstration schools.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I had the pleasure this morning of meeting with a group. I'd like to introduce and welcome the Diller Teen Fellows from Eilat, Israel, to the House today. These teens are visiting Toronto as part of an international leadership program in partnership with the Toronto Jewish community, and I welcome them here to Queen's Park.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce, from the township of Cavan Monaghan, Scott McFadden, Yvette Hurley and Brigid Ayotte. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to introduce Carrie Helmer. Her daughter Katie Helmer attends the Amethyst Demonstration School, and they're here today at Queen's Park.

Hon. David Zimmer: I would like to introduce guests from the Professional Engineers Government of Ontario: Ping Wu, president; Jim Chisholm, vice-president; Martin Haalstra, board director; George Collins, board director; Hiona Murray, labour relations officer; and Howard Brown, their consultant.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to welcome from my riding Jill, Alex and Evan Grant; Lynn, Raymond, April and Thomas Desormeaux; Laurie, Peter and James Forrester; and Dr. Diane, Martin, Chris and Micheal Poilly. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: On behalf of the Legislature, I would like to wish a happy birthday to Sophie Kiwala, who turned 28 on April 10.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to welcome those from my constituency here for the demonstration today, but I also

just noticed that Martin Haalstra is here, a constituent of mine and an engineer. Thanks for coming in.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome the members from Sarnia-Lambton that are here with the demonstration schools today as well.

Mr. Todd Smith: I would also like to welcome all of our special guests here from Sagonaska, which of course is the demonstration school in Belleville, and those with an interest in Sir James Whitney School in Belleville as well. We welcome them all to the Legislature here today.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I understand that today, in the House, we have some members from Glenburnie School in Oakville. Please give them a warm Queen's Park welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Today we have in the Speaker's gallery the new consul general of Malta in Toronto, Ms. Hanan El Khatib, and joining the consul general is Ms. Karen Zahra, the administrative officer. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Just before we start question period, another note—please bear with me. The rules that were changed with regard to introductions—I want to be clear. I try not to be heavy-handed when it comes to introducing our guests. Two things have happened lately that kind of elicit from me that I have to start being either tougher on the time or tougher on the introductions. It's a time for introducing people. To give a speech or to make some kind of statement beyond that, there's another place for that in the House. The introductions are set there by your rules to simply introduce our guests.

I would appreciate it very much if you did not take advantage of that in any other way, either by stretching things out or making some kind of editorial comment. Please, just introduce our guests, because we want them here, and nine times out of 10 we know why they're here. There's another place for that to be done in this House, and I appreciate your indulgence and your co-operation in that.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. I have heard story after story from students and parents that have been positively impacted by Ontario's demonstration and provincial schools. Just look at each and every family here today: They represent the countless success stories and soon-to-be success stories. Blind, deaf and learning-disabled students are able to flourish because of these schools. I have heard a student say that the demonstration school actually saved their life.

This government can't play games with the education of these children. My question is very direct, very straightforward to the Premier: Will you commit to keeping the Ontario provincial demonstration schools open for years to come?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome all of the parents and the families here today. It's very important that we have this conversation and you're very welcome. Thank you for coming to the Legislature.

Our government is committed to the success and well-being of every child in this province. We're committed to giving every child access to the programming that they need. I know that there have been successes in the programming in the provincial and demonstration schools. One of the challenges that we have is that there are children who are not in the provincial and demonstration schools who actually need access to programming such as is in the provincial and demonstration schools. So we launched consultations to better understand how students currently attending the provincial and demonstration schools are being supported. I know the Minister of Education will have more to say about that process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Back to the Premier: This morning, the people of Ontario got to meet Lexi. I had the chance to speak with 10-year-old Lexi a couple of weeks ago at my constituency office in Belleville, and let me tell you, this is one intelligent girl who is as cute as a button. When we sat in my office, she had prepared text that she read for me. It was in a large font and spaced out, and she did extremely well. But when I asked her to read something that I had on my desk that was in a 12-point font, Lexi struggled and actually broke down in tears. That's completely unacceptable that that should happen. She deserves a future just like other kids do. She wants to go to Sagonaska next year, like her brother did, and have the future that her brother now has. But there are kids like Lexi in every county and every city right across Ontario.

My question to the Premier is simple: Why does she think it's acceptable to put the education of students with severe learning disabilities in year-to-year chaos, when it would be unacceptable for any other student?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I, too, would like to welcome all of the families that are here today from both the demonstration schools and the provincial schools around the province.

I want to respond to the member by saying that we get it. The demonstration schools provide a wonderful program. The demonstration schools provide a very effective program. But what you're reporting, which is that here is a child who needs the programming—there are thousands of children around Ontario who need the programming, and we need to figure out how—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If you're going to start taking advantage of it, I'm going to start calling it.

Answer?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We need to figure out how we can deliver programming to kids all over the province who can't read, because we want all the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Final supplementary. The member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Marie Desrosier lives in North Bay, and her daughter Amanda is enrolled at the Sagonaska Demonstration School. She wrote to our leader, "Without these schools, students like my daughter would not be employable because they would never make it through high school. My daughter is 15 years old and was reading at a grade one level in September of this school year. Today, after six months at Sagonaska, she's reading at a grade three level, with hopes of reaching age-level reading within another year." She continued: "The closure of these schools will mean that these students will never reach their full potential."

Will the Premier stand here today and promise Marie Desrosier that these schools will remain open in the years ahead so that her daughter will have the opportunity to graduate high school?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Yes, and just to be clear, I want everyone to be aware that the application process for the demonstration schools and the enrolment in the provincial schools for the deaf will be continuing. Those processes are starting up again for the 2016-17 year. So for any of the students who are currently enrolled at a demonstration school and are in year one of the program, and who the school says require a second year, then those children would be able to complete that second year. It's the principals who actually designate whether the students should go for one year or whether they need to continue for a second year. But for those students who are in the first year of a program and the principal recommends they continue in the second year, they will be able to do that.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. Parents from my riding with children at Belleville's Sagonaska Demonstration School are among the hundreds here today. They've been spared for one year, but their fight isn't over. They've fought too hard to maintain these life-changing programs to risk what might happen after this year. As one mom in my riding told me, "This school will not just educate my child, but will change the trajectory of his life." If the government was truly listening to these parents like her, they'd stop trying to close these schools and work to put more kids in them.

Speaker, will the Premier guarantee that these schools will be open after the 2016-17 year, and will she assure the parents with us today that the families won't be put through this again next year?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the Minister of Education has said, there was a consultation to better understand how students who are currently attending the provincial and demonstration schools can best be supported and, beyond that, to determine how we can support these

kids and their families and how we can support the thousands of kids and their families—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —how we can provide access to programs that are much needed for the thousands of kids and families who don't have access at this point. Surely that is a point that we can agree on: that of course the kids and the families who are here are extremely important, but there are thousands of kids outside of these schools who also need support. That's what we need to determine: How do we, as a society, provide access to all of the kids who need the programs?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: My constituent Ruth Bourachot's son, Nathaniel, struggles with learning disabilities. Last fall, Nathaniel was accepted to the Trillium Demonstration School in Milton. Ruth tells me he entered grade 7 this year with zero ability to read. Today he has now surpassed kindergarten reading and is moving to grade 3 reading. Ms. Bourachot states that her son's success at Trillium is incredible, and I agree.

Ms. Bourachot told the Toronto Star yesterday, "They can open the applications and close the door again. They haven't told the teachers they'll have their jobs back in September; they haven't told the counsellors and support [staff] they'll have their jobs back in September."

Will the Premier please explain to educators why these issues remain unanswered and why she's leaving such uncertainty out there? Have a heart; clean it up today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Education is going to want to speak to the logistics around staffing, but I just want to be perfectly clear. I understand how important these programs are to the children and the families who are here today, but it is our responsibility to make sure that we don't stand in the way of a change that could actually provide more service and more programming to children across the province.

If the member opposite is asking me: Will we never change those opportunities? Will we stand in the way of other kids getting the program that they need?—no. I won't commit to that. I believe that the education system has to continue to evolve.

My hope for this consultation was—and I said this to the Minister of Education before it started—that we'd be able to work with the families who have these programs and with the families outside of the programs to figure out how we can solve the problem for the kids who do not have access to this program.

1050

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary. The member from Huron—Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Premier: Your government is failing students and families who rely on your province's demonstration schools.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Schools like Robarts and Amethyst give young people opportunities to build their skills, confidence and hope so that they can look ahead optimistically to the future.

In a meeting just last Friday with families from my riding, I learned of a young lady who so honestly said that when she's sitting in a classroom full of classmates, knowing that she learns differently, she never feels more alone. Premier, that's not the inclusion these young people deserve. This young lady wants to learn amongst her peers.

Despite the short-term solution that we heard the minister announce yesterday, the Liberals have done nothing to help families plan for long term. We need to hear from the Premier today. Will she commit to all of the families from Huron and across Ontario today that she'll remove the cap and keep the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I just want to clarify the situation. The formal consultation process ended on April 8. I'm actually still having some meetings with various parties, so we haven't made any decisions yet in terms of how we provide programming in the future. As the Premier has noted, we want to find a way that will provide good, solid programming of the nature provided in the demonstration schools in a variety of locations, but we haven't made any decisions about how we do that.

But what I can assure you is that we didn't just notify the media of the decision. Before we did that yesterday, we notified the unions, we notified the principals, we—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I stand; you sit.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to speak. I stand; you sit.

New question.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. For months, families and students with exceptional learning needs have pleaded with this government to keep their schools open. They've organized, they've gathered thousands of signatures and they've rallied from Belleville to London. Today, hundreds of families from across the province join us here at Queen's Park, united for one reason and one reason only: the future of our provincial and demonstration schools.

It boggles the mind to think that this Premier doesn't see the value in schools that help some of our most vulnerable children. It all comes down to priorities. Children should always be our priority, Speaker. They should always be our priority.

Will this Premier listen to families and commit to keeping these schools open long-term, or will she turn her back on our most vulnerable children?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, our priority is actually all the children in this province. It is absolutely fundamental that we provide the programming that kids need, the supports that they need, which is why we value the programming in the provincial and demonstration schools. We know that there are aspects of those programs that are very, very successful, and we want to make sure as we go through this process that we provide opportunities for the thousands of kids and the thousands of families who don't have access to those programs, that we provide those opportunities so that every child in the province gets the opportunity that they deserve.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier has the final word when it comes to prioritization of what this government sees as important, and I guess vulnerable children just don't check the boxes for the Premier when it comes to priorities. Families should not be forced to fight for the opportunity for their children to thrive—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Provincial schools for the deaf allow students to be immersed in an ASL or LSQ environment, essential for individual expression. Demonstration schools boost reading comprehension and competence for students with exceptional learning needs.

Will this Premier confirm that her government has no plans to close any provincial or demonstration school in this year or next year or in the long term?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I cannot in good conscience say that we will never change anything about the delivery of programming in education, which is exactly what the leader of the third party and the Leader of the Opposition are asking.

I cannot in good conscience say that as we see changes in society, as we see changes in health—I know that there's a huge debate about the programming for deaf and deaf-blind children and the availability of ASL and LSQ in our schools. It's something that I dealt with when I was Minister of Education. A former member here, Gary Malkowski, worked with me so that we could change regulations so that there would be more ASL delivered in our schools.

I understand that there are debates that have to be engaged. One of those debates is, how do we make sure that programming that works for kids has the opportunity to work for all kids in the province who need it?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Closing enrolment without notice to families and students for these schools was the wrong thing to do. It was a callous and inappropriate move for this government to take. What did this Premier think was going to happen? Of course students and families rallied to try to save the very thing that they need, to make sure that their kids could reach their potential.

For at least a month, New Democrats have been raising this issue in the House, and for a while now, this government has dodged any commitment to actually backtracking on their wrong-headed decision.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, second time.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So now, here we are: hundreds of people on the lawn of the Legislature this afternoon.

This government has made a commitment to a small change of direction for September, but what all of these families and all of these people need to know is that the change is permanent and they will not close the demonstration and provincial schools in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will say that what the leader of the third party is asking is that we determine that it is impossible to provide more programming and more opportunities for the thousands of kids who are not in these schools. What the leader of the third party is saying is, "You can't change. You cannot change the delivery of programs in this province." That's just not reasonable. We have to be able to work with the families.

As I said before, one of the conversations that the Minister of Education and I had was, how do we work with the families to determine what's in the best interests of the kids who are here today and the kids who are in these schools and accessing these programs, but beyond that, what is the solution for the kids who are not in these schools?

The enrolment has been reopened, but final decisions haven't been made. I pray that we'll have the opportunity to work with families to come up with solutions that work for these kids and all of the kids in the province.

FUNDRAISING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. I don't understand why this government thinks that they need to rob Peter to pay Paul. It seems that they do that on every single file, and it's the wrong thing to do.

It's good to see that the Premier can admit when she's wrong and overturn some of her bad decisions, whether it's backing off on a plan to double drug costs for seniors, lifting the freeze on enrolment at the provincial and

demonstration schools, or backing off on bad regulation changes for child care.

When will the Premier reconsider her undemocratic plan to change election financing laws and open the process to include a non-partisan panel?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I believe that the House leaders are meeting either today or in the very near future to talk about what the committee process will be as we move to bring legislation forward in the spring, in the next few weeks, so that we can move to getting legislation to first reading and have a broad consultation across the province after first reading, and then again after second reading.

1100

I'm looking forward to that input. I'm looking forward to that discussion that should take place into May and June, and into the summer and then into the fall. I look forward to all of that input as we, together, move to what I believe is a fair degree of consensus in terms of the changes that need to be made to fundraising, but we need that input in order to get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier is making a mistake by writing new election laws by herself without prior consultation with civil society, other political parties or Ontarians. At a time when people are increasingly cynical about politics, one party changing election rules all by itself is only going to make people more cynical.

Will this Premier respect the democratic rights of Ontarians to have a say in their own electoral system and open up the process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The process that we're putting forward, given that there is a broad consensus, given that there are other jurisdictions that have moved on many of the changes that we're proposing—the federal government, some other provinces—and given that we're proposing we bring legislation and we move to consultation after first reading across the province and then again after second reading, is quintessentially the democratic process. That is how this Legislature works. That is how decisions are made. It's not one party. The role of the Legislature is to bring forward legislation, to have a debate and to listen to that debate, and then to make changes based on it and to move forward.

That's what we're going to do, and I look forward to the input. I asked for input from the leaders of the opposition parties. I hope I will hear from them, Mr. Speaker, as we draft the legislation, but, for sure, we will hear from people across the province as we go into consultation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, what a difference a little bit of power makes. Members of the Liberal front bench once called it "antidemocratic" to unilaterally change election laws. They saw, rightly, that changing election laws without consensus and public buy-in is bad for democracy.

People deserve to know that our democracy is fair, and the party writing the rules doesn't have its thumb on the scale. This Premier, who was instrumental in creating the system of ministerial quotas, appearing to sell access to government decision-makers and shaking the public trust, is not one to be now changing the rules on her own.

Will this Premier open up the process of updating campaign financing to a fast-moving, independent panel and start to rebuild Ontarian's trust in their government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I really don't understand why the NDP leader is undermining the role of the legislators. We're elected for the sole purpose of developing legislation. That is exactly the job that is given to us by the people of Ontario.

Speaker, you don't need a grade 10 civics lesson to know that. I don't know what she says when she goes to her schools in grade 10 classes as to what the role of the legislators is. It is to bring forward legislation; it is to hold public consultations; it is to listen to Ontarians; it is to then make amendments through the clause-by-clause process.

I look forward to speaking with the other House leaders this afternoon to talk about how we can develop a process that will ensure that Ontarians from across this great province have an opportunity to provide their input and for experts to come forward to provide their input. That is our role as legislators. We should be doing our job by following suit.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question: The member from Sarnia-Lambton.

Applause.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you. My question is to the Minister of Education this morning. Minister, today, there are five families from Sarnia-Lambton who are counting on the life-changing education that their children receive at the Amethyst Demonstration School in London. There are dozens more whose children have graduated from the intensive program at Amethyst and are now thriving in secondary and post-secondary education. There are even more families eager to apply for admission to Amethyst, knowing in their hearts that the education their children receive from this school will change their child's future forever.

Yet these families fear that this government is preparing to close Amethyst. These concerned parents and students I've met with have contacted my office and described the Amethyst Demonstration School as essential, a blessing and their last hope.

Minister, will you commit today to keeping Amethyst open not just for current students but also for future enrolment by students from Sarnia-Lambton and across Ontario?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to make it clear, Speaker, that we're concerned about all special-needs students,

wherever they may be in the province. It's precisely because we're concerned about the students who are deaf, deaf-blind or who have severe special learning disability needs that we started the consultations in the first place.

We want to figure out how we can provide the best program possible, particularly for all those students with severe learning disabilities and for all those students in southwestern Ontario or eastern Ontario who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

It's because we are concerned about those students that we entered into the consultations. At this point, no decisions have been made on the outcome of the consultations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Minister, you started the consultations, but you shut down enrolment and you've refused to offer future employment for the teachers that are working at these schools. We think you're thinking something else during this process. Thankfully, you realized you made a mistake, and because of the parents who are here and the protests, you started the admittance process again.

I have a constituent of mine, Josh, and due to his age, this is his last chance to have a hope for his future. But your government is only committing to one year for Josh, and most students need more than that.

Minister, the application process alone takes a year to start. Your actions today will deter students from applying for next year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chair, please.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Due to uncertainty, Mr. Speaker—sorry—the school system may not get the necessary applications, leading to your argument that there are not enough students for the programs.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit today to keeping Robarts School for the Deaf and the Amethyst Demonstration School in London open beyond this coming school year? Or was her decision yesterday simply to shut down the protests?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I noted earlier, the formal consultations ended on April 8. At one of the meetings that we had with the parents, the parents had asked if we would reopen the process for this year. People had already put together the binders, put together the psychological testing. I committed to them at one of the parent meetings that once the formal consultations were over, we would look at whether or not we would reopen the process for this year.

I followed through on that commitment when the formal consultation process was done. We announced yesterday that in fact the application process is open again for the 2016-17 year. That's exactly what I committed to determining. I determined that the process is open for the 2016-17 year.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Education. The government keeps saying more children need access to specialized programming that's available at demonstration and provincial schools. So why did the minister cap enrolment in the first place? If more children need access to these programs, why are they even thinking about closing them? It just doesn't make sense. Children with exceptional learning needs deserve better from this government. We know these programs are successful. The minister herself admits it.

Will the minister tell families in the gallery, and those that are at home today, that the provincial and demonstration schools will remain open after the 2016-17 school year?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I just said, we're in the process of completing the consultations. We're reviewing the information that has come in, and no decision has been made as a result of the consultations.

We do respect the fact that these are highly successful programs. That's why we have reopened the admission, to ensure that for those who have submitted their applications for the 2016-17 year, that process will go forward.

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We are committed, though, to figuring out how we manage to serve kids with severe learning disabilities from all across the province. There are children from all across the province with severe learning disabilities who are not being adequately served right now, and that's a problem we need to fix. We need to make sure that students all over the province—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Minister of Education: This government is failing vulnerable children. Their spin doesn't make sense. In fact, the minister's own briefing note that I obtained through a freedom of information request shows that the consultation process ends with a discussion with unions on details of staff impact. That directly shows that they were considering closing these schools all along. It seems like the minister started "consulting" with the end goal of closing schools without actually listening to what was said. That is shameful. Today the minister should listen to children and families; listen to what these schools have meant to them. Children are begging the minister to listen.

Again, will the Minister of Education guarantee that these important schools will stay open beyond the 2016-17 school year? Will she make a long-term commitment to these worried families?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: What I will commit to is that we want to find a way to serve all the children in the province with severe learning disabilities. The fact that we

have heard over and over again, from children and families all across the province, that children who have average or above average intelligence and who are in grade 7, 8, 9 or 10 are unable to read beyond a kindergarten or grade 1 level says to me that we have a problem; there's a problem that we need to solve. We need to make a commitment to all those students that we are looking at how we design programs to best serve children with severe learning disabilities all over the province. That's what the consultations are about.

ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS
AND SERVICES

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Speaker, I'm sure I speak for all members of this House when I say, collectively, that we were deeply saddened by the tragic news in Attawapiskat this weekend. The First Nations community of less than 2,000 people saw 11 people try to take their lives on Saturday night. This community has seen over 100 suicide attempts since last September, and the community declared a state of emergency over the weekend.

I know the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care visited Attawapiskat yesterday. Can the Minister of Children and Youth Services please update this House on the visit and what was heard from the community of Attawapiskat?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for this very important and serious question.

Yes, I did travel yesterday with the Minister of Health to the Attawapiskat community to speak, not just to communities but to the youth themselves and their leadership. We heard how we must all work together on short-, medium- and long-term solutions to address very serious challenges facing this community and their youth.

Our government will be providing additional assistance to the community, following the government's emergency medical assistance team—also known as EMAT—assessment. There's an EMAT reconnaissance team, working with the local band council, as well as the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority, to determine how EMAT can best provide assistance in this community.

The assessment led to some very important actions our government will be taking, which will be touched on in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Minister, it sounds like our government took immediate action to address the crisis in Attawapiskat. But we've heard time and again that these underserved areas face serious and chronic problems. A visit from the ministers, while it's informative and important, is not enough if we're really going to address the epidemic problems the First Nations communities like Attawapiskat face.

Speaker, through you: Did the minister come to any agreements with the community about the best way to

move forward so that Attawapiskat will receive the full supports that they need?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We are actually, right now, deploying 13 health care personnel, including mental health workers. We're providing \$2 million in support.

But I want to speak to just how moved Tracy and I were in Attawapiskat yesterday. The incredible leadership demonstrated by the local chief, Chief Shisheesh, and the band council—we were accompanied by Perry Bellegarde, who is the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations. But the youth that we met—and we met dozens of youth, who are demonstrating such tremendous courage and determination.

All we need to do is follow the path that they themselves have set out for us to follow, in terms of providing not just the immediate support that we announced yesterday, but that long-term support to restore their hope, to restore their futures.

We stand side by side with those youth, with the local leadership and the community and Perry Bellegarde, to make sure that we're working hard, and with our federal partners, to solve this crisis.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Julia Munro: My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, my constituents are concerned about the current situation regarding demonstration and provincial schools in Ontario.

Ontario has recognized its duty to provide education to deaf students for well over 100 years. My constituents, like Ann and Harold Wall, are worried that without dedicated schools for deaf children, these children will not have the full ability to participate in academic, social and extracurricular aspects of their education. How can they learn when they don't have the opportunity to communicate?

Minister, will you do the right thing and eliminate the ongoing uncertainty, anxiety and the fear of closure of the demonstration and provincial schools in Ontario? Yes or no?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Liz Sandals: You mentioned schools for the deaf. I believe that students who live in your riding would be going to a school for the deaf. The Drury school for the deaf in Milton would be probably the usual placement, or possibly at the east-end side of your riding, it might be Whitney in Belleville.

I have said all along that we will continue to be operating the school for the deaf in Milton, Drury, and the school for the deaf in Belleville, Whitney. We understand that those are the schools that offer a program in ASL, American Sign Language. ASL is the teaching language at those two schools for the deaf.

We have committed, right from the beginning, that those are not schools that we have been consulting on, that certainly those schools will continue to operate, and that that is—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Minister of Education. Chris Zondervan from Shakespeare attends Amethyst Demonstration School. This specialized school environment has increased his confidence, and his learning has progressed at an exceptional rate. Without Amethyst, his family tells me they don't think he could have graduated high school with a diploma. His mother, Cindy, put it best. She says, "Our students did not create Ontario's deficit, and we should not jeopardize their future to fix it."

Will the minister please explain to Chris and his family why she is willing to jeopardize his future? Will she do the right thing and guarantee—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Sport is warned.

Please finish.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, will she do the right thing and guarantee that Chris's school will remain open?

Hon. Liz Sandals: First of all, I want to assure everyone that this is not about money. This is about how we provide the best programming possible to students who are deaf and to students who have severe learning disabilities.

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It's precisely because of people like Chris, who have been able to attend the program and who have been successful in the program and have graduated and gone on to employment—it is precisely because we see that success that we want to look at how more students can enjoy the success of—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron-Bruce, come to order.

Hon. Liz Sandals: It has nothing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. For the second time today, please, when I stand, you sit. And the member from Huron-Bruce just kept right on going when I asked her to come to order.

You have one wrap-up sentence.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Let me just assure people that the reason that we are looking at the consultations is so that we can do a better job for our children with special needs.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Two days ago, more than 200 parents came to the Legislature to make their voices heard on the minister's autism funding mistake. Instead of properly investing to ensure all kids with ASD, regard-

less of age, receive the supports they need, the minister decided to try to make a good-news announcement out of kicking kids five and over off the list for life-changing, essential therapy.

In the end, this minister holds the responsibility for the books. Where are her priorities? Why are they not helping some of our most vulnerable kids? Why is she trying to balance the books on the backs of kids with ASD? Will the minister explain to families of kids—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not endearing you to me.

Please finish.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker.

Will the President of the Treasury Board please explain to families of children with ASD over the age of five why she doesn't think they're worth helping?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm afraid this question demonstrates a very serious problem in the caucus of the third party. The budget they voted against yesterday included an additional \$333 million—additional dollars—for kids with autism. They can stand up and complain about what we are doing; we added \$333 million to kids with autism and they somehow interpret that as a cut. That's irresponsible; it's very unfortunate. It is unfair to the parents of kids with autism to suggest that we are cutting services when, in fact, we are adding \$333 million to service kids with autism. Shame on you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: The families and kids in this province know where the problems are coming from and it's certainly not in my backyard that they're looking. I don't know how this minister sleeps with herself at night.

As experts and parents have laid out, it's either pay now or pay later; help kids develop skills for independence or pay later.

The minister has to live with the fact that her funding decision, according to the experts, will leave kids with ASD with higher rates of behavioural difficulties and possibly worse: institutionalization, a life confined to a room or even their own bed. We've seen what this looks like, Speaker, and it's devastating. This is not the future kids with ASD deserve in this province.

With the stroke of a pen, she can reverse this decision and ensure that kids with autism get the IBI that they so desperately deserve.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In fairness to the kids with autism in Ontario, and the parents and families of kids with autism, the NDP should be recognizing that 16,000 more kids are going to get access to evidence-based care

for autism—16,000 more kids. Only the NDP could characterize—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Only the NDP could characterize an additional \$333 million as a cut.

But that's not the only thing they voted against in yesterday's budget bill. They voted against free tuition for low-income and middle-income kids—free tuition, an absolutely transformational change in this province. The NDP, who used to be the champion for low-income people, has turned their back on them and voted—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Yvan Baker: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Minister, yesterday this House passed Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act. This piece of legislation is, of course, adjacent to our 2016 budget, which will help to make Ontarians' everyday lives better.

Minister, you and I have spoken on a number of occasions and, as a business person, you know that I am a passionate advocate to make sure that we're building a strong economy and supporting the creation of jobs. The Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act also outlines the next phase of our government's plan to do just that, while helping people to reach their full potential and succeed in an evolving economy.

Could the minister please inform this House about how the 2016 budget and budget bill will improve the lives of everyday Ontarians?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre for the question. As the member said, yesterday our government passed the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act. The 2016 budget is part of our government's economic plan to build Ontario up and to deliver its number one priority: to grow the economy and create jobs.

The four-part plan includes investing in talents and skills, including helping more people get and create the jobs of the future by expanding access to high-quality college and university education. The plan is making the largest investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history and investing in a low-carbon economy driven by innovative, high-growth, export-oriented businesses. The plan is also helping working Ontarians achieve a more secure retirement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Minister. Many of my constituents have expressed support for a number of very important elements of this budget, in particular the record investment in public infrastructure, the investments in community care and palliative care, and the free shingles vaccine.

As a member of the Treasury Board, Minister, I am proud of the work that not only the Treasury Board, but you, our Premier, all our cabinet and our caucus have

done to make sure that we're working towards a balanced budget by 2017-18 while protecting the services that everyday Ontarians value so much.

Minister, could you tell us what other measures were enacted yesterday by the passing of the 2016 budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm happy to answer the question from the member from Etobicoke Centre, who has been a champion on Treasury Board as well. As the member said, we consulted with many Ontarians about their priorities and their values, which our plan has outlined in the 2016 budget.

Unfortunately, yesterday the opposition decided to let politics get in the way of supporting these initiatives that will help Ontarians both today and tomorrow. For example, yesterday they voted against \$400 million to the Business Growth Initiative to invest in our plan to grow the economy and create jobs. They voted against transforming student financial assistance to make it more upfront and affordable. They voted against providing an additional \$1 billion for health care and increasing hospital-based funding. They voted against ensuring Ontario leads the low-carbon economy that will ensure \$1.9 billion in reinvestment in green projects. Worse yet, they voted against making everyday life easier for Ontarians by eliminating fees and costs, like Drive Clean, and lowering hospital parking costs.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Minister of Education. In my family, someone I love grew up with a severe learning disability. Because of proper training, he has now grown up to become a professor, take a PhD and rise to very senior positions in the government of Canada.

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I didn't fully appreciate his struggles until I heard Lexi, a grade 5 student who wants to continue to go to Sagonaska, read to us this morning. It was incredibly emotional. She deserves to thrive just as those like her brother did before her.

Responses from your government today have been less than reassuring. Their noncommittal is increasing anxiety not just here in the gallery today but I'm sure across Ontario.

My constituent Kelly Foley's son attended Sagonaska. She called the school life-changing. Her son has been able to thrive and succeed because of that school. I ask the minister to have some compassion today, provide some long-term clarity to the people in this gallery and make sure that those schools remain open without a cap, and that there's a long-term plan.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister of Education?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As I've said, we are very concerned about kids who have severe learning disabilities. We know that in the case of some of the children who are

attending or who would like to attend the demonstration schools, there is a significant gap between their age level, their presumed grade level and their access to reading.

We know that for some of the children, they've been in special-needs programs at their local school board and they've been unsuccessful, and that the program that's delivered at the demonstration school is excellent and has been successful.

We know that there are others, like your relative, who have successfully had programs delivered in their local school boards so that they've been able to learn to read.

We need to figure out how more students can have success. That's the purpose of the consultation, to figure out how more students can—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Supplementary? The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Minister of Education: This Liberal government says it's for the people, about the people, but when put to the test, nothing could be further from the truth. They're cutting provincial and demonstration schools for children and students with special education needs and who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind.

The minister says it's not about money, but they fired 50 special education teachers in my riding, and now they are threatening to close provincial and demonstration schools.

This Liberal government's waste and mismanagement is seriously undermining special education services across Ontario, and for parents of children with complex and special needs, it's catastrophic.

Speaker, why is this minister telling parents in my riding, like Melanie Dennie and dozens of others, their children are getting more special education dollars when in fact she is cutting core special education resources and threatening to close schools across Ontario?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Okay, let me try and correct the list of bits of misinformation there.

Interjection: There's not enough time.

Hon. Liz Sandals: True. Somebody said there's not—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister will withdraw.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Firstly, we are not looking at schools for the blind. The provincial school for the blind—of which there is only one, in Brantford; we'll get the name of the city right—is continuing. The school at Brantford actually does the programming for the deaf-blind, at least in the English-language side.

We in fact have already said that we're not closing the AS schools for the deaf, the two big ones in Milton and Belleville. So the idea that we are closing all these schools is simply wrong.

What we are doing is looking at how we can provide better programming for children who are deaf, because we are concerned about the programming at some of the schools, and how we can provide better—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. The first line of the sunshine list law indicates very clearly that public disclosure is required for salary and benefits for anyone earning over \$100,000 in the public sector.

For years, New Democrats have been calling for bringing public sector executive pay under control. According to the government sunshine list, the CEO for OPG earned \$787,000. However, according to OPG itself, that amount is close to double that, and more like \$1.4 million.

On one hand, we have the government disclosing one amount. On the other hand, we have the OPG itself disclosing another amount. The question is simple: How much did the CEO for OPG actually earn?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond to the member on this, on behalf of our Minister of Energy. The fact is, the current CEO, Jeffrey Lyash, is earning 3% less than his predecessor.

I've got to tell you, when you look at this kind of position, you're talking about a CEO who is in a position where you have to globally compete for that talent. These are the folks who are running our nuclear units. These are the folks who are running our entire energy production system. These are not the places where you would go to get anybody who is anything less than the best in the world, to ensure that Ontario Power Generation and our energy system is operating efficiently, effectively and safely. This is not the place to go when it comes to trying to discount people's earnings. This is the place where you want the best in the world, and that's what we have.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: In case anyone forgot, the question was about disclosure, and there was absolutely no answer to that question.

For more than a decade, the Liberals have promised to bring public sector executive pay under control. In fact, they passed legislation in 2014 to try to address this issue, and now they're promising to do something on this issue again. It was a stretch goal for the Liberals 10 years ago, and it's a stretch goal again right now.

On top of all that, we have information before us that this government has not been disclosing the full truth in their own sunshine list.

Ontarians deserve transparency. That is something they have a right to have.

My question is simple: Given the lack of information provided by this government, how many other public sector executives are earning more than what the government admits?

Hon. Brad Duguid: To the President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As the minister said, the income reported for Jeff Lyash in the 2015 public sector salary disclosure was \$787,472. That included his entire signing bonus, plus his salary for 2015, from August to December. He started in his position as CEO in August.

When it comes to the broader question of executive compensation frameworks, we are moving forward with developing those frameworks for executive compensation. It is not a simple task. It is not as simple as they claim—"Just make it double the Premier's salary."

We're taking a thoughtful approach. We started with the college and university sector. The frameworks are now out for consultation. We are moving forward with agencies, Speaker. It's important that we get this right. We need to find the right balance between attracting the right people and having reasonable levels of compensation.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

Mr. Granville Anderson: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, yesterday the PC and NDP caucuses voted against the budget bill, Bill 173, which will serve to relieve the financial burden that many families face in post-secondary education.

Many of the students in my riding of Durham rely on the Ontario Student Assistance Program to help pay the cost of tuition. My constituents were very pleased about the many changes our government made to OSAP in the 2016 budget.

Minister, would you kindly inform members of the House how our government is making post-secondary education more accessible and affordable across Ontario in 2016?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Durham for that excellent question.

Mr. Speaker, our government strongly believes that all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, should be able to afford to go to college or university in the province of Ontario. That's why we have decided to transform OSAP in the 2016 budget, which will lead to more students receiving more generous upfront grants and, in many cases, help students receive grants that exceed average tuition.

Student associations, poverty reduction groups, and our colleges and universities have praised the introduction of the simpler and upfront Ontario Student Grant. The new Ontario Student Grant is a smarter way to allocate taxpayer dollars and help the students who need it the most.

It is unfortunate that the members opposite said no to the 2016 budget bill and therefore said no to real action to break down some of the main barriers to post-secondary education in our province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you to the minister for that response. It is disappointing that the members opposite voted against Bill 173, but it is reassuring to

hear that this government places such a high priority on providing access to education, so many people can get good jobs and actively contribute to our economic growth in this wonderful province.

Despite the significant improvements that the province has made since 2003, there remains a direct correlation between family income levels and the likelihood of attending college or university. Minister, you have spoken a great deal about the needs of students. Could you talk further about the impact that this modernized student financial assistance will have?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, I want to thank the member for that question. Our government is working hard to break down the barriers that are preventing Ontarians from getting a post-secondary education. That is why, in September 2017, all college, university and career college students who come from families with household incomes of less than \$50,000 will have the Ontario Student Grant that will cover their tuition. In addition, more than half of students whose household income is below \$83,000 will receive grants that will cover or exceed the average cost of tuition.

Under the new Ontario Student Grant, more than 150,000 students will have upfront grants that will cover more than the average cost of tuition, and 250,000 students will have less debt than they would have under the current OSAP program. I am pleased that this government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, has broken down the barrier—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S TRAILS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE SOUTIEN AUX SENTIERS DE L'ONTARIO

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts / Projet de loi 100, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur les sentiers de l'Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1142 to 1147.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On February 18, 2016, Mr. Coteau moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts.

Mr. Crack has moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Crack's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gravelle, Michael	Meilleur, Madeleine
Anderson, Granville	Hoggarth, Ann	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Moridi, Reza
Ballard, Chris	Hunter, Mitzie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Naqvi, Yasir
Bradley, James J.	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Qadri, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Vernile, Daiene
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Dong, Han	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	McGarry, Kathryn	Zimmer, David
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMahon, Eleanor	
Fraser, John	McMeekin, Ted	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Natyshak, Taras
Arnott, Ted	Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Hatfield, Percy	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Sattler, Peggy
Brown, Patrick	Hudak, Tim	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Jones, Sylvia	Singh, Jagmeet
Coe, Lorne	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
DiNovo, Cheri	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Fedeli, Victor	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
Forster, Cindy	McDonnell, Jim	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Yakabuski, John
Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 52; the nays are 42.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Coteau has moved second reading of Bill 100, An Act to enact the Ontario Trails Act, 2016 and to amend various Acts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1151 to 1152.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gélinas, France	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gravelle, Michael	Miller, Norm
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gretzky, Lisa	Miller, Paul
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Hoggarth, Ann	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Horwath, Andrea	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Hunter, Mitzie	Potts, Arthur

Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad
Fedeli, Victor
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Fraser, John
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

Jaczek, Helena
Jones, Sylvia
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McDonnell, Jim
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine

Qaadri, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sattler, Peggy
Scott, Laurie
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Smith, Todd
Sousa, Charles
Takhar, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Vernile, Daiene
Walker, Bill
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The Robarts School for the Deaf in London provides life-changing support for kids who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

One of those students is a four-year-old girl named Jaya, who lives in my riding of Oxford. I've met with her mother, who talked about the difference the school has made for Jaya and the difference that the support has made to their family. She says the deaf school is the student's lifeline to language, education and identity.

Since Jaya has attended the Robarts School for the Deaf, she has started making eye contact. Deaf role models are showing her that she is not alone. She can now communicate with her parents. But she's only four, and she needs the school for many years to come. It's the only way she will get the critical language skills that she needs.

Her mother has written to the Minister of Education and the Premier, begging them to keep the school open, yet she has been left to live in fear. She's here today, along with hundreds of parents, asking the government to not close down these life-changing schools. But this morning, the Minister of Education once again refused to commit that Robarts and these essential schools will stay open.

I'm asking the government to give these students like Jaya a chance to succeed. I'm asking them to end the fear for these families and commit that the Robarts School for the Deaf and the other provincial schools will stay open in the long term.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present this statement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bailey, Robert
Brown, Patrick
Clark, Steve
Coe, Lorne
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael

Hudak, Tim
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila
McNaughton, Monte
Munro, Julia
Nicholls, Rick

Pettapiece, Randy
Thompson, Lisa M.
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 77; the nays are 17.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to send it to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As requested.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the member from Brampton–Springdale.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I would like to introduce a long-time family friend of ours who's in the visitors' gallery today: Mr. Gurmail Saggu. Thank you for joining us at Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no further deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1155 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm so pleased to welcome, once again, Willem Hart from the riding of Thornhill. He's really having a great and exciting day today, I think, meeting the mayor of Tel Aviv, Ron Huldai, this morning, and lots of other dignitaries.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'd like to introduce Lalita Tamburri, who is here from Oxford today with the folks who are dealing with special-ed schools.

ESSEX COUNTY

AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME

Mr. Taras Natyshak: As always, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the Legislature to recognize good people doing great things in my riding.

Last week, I had the pleasure of attending the Essex County Agricultural Hall of Fame induction ceremonies and to congratulate the three inductees for 2016. Dianne Colantonio, Mary Jane Laframboise and Glen Waites now have a place among the giants of farming in Essex county.

Mary Jane Laframboise lived on the family farm on the Arner town line. She obtained a BA and a teaching certificate. She is a former vice-president of the Essex County Federation of Agriculture and the former provincial director of the federation of agriculture, and she has been involved with the Anderdon Women's Institute for quite some time. Mary Jane has always been active with the Farm Safety Association, and has passionately advocated for safer farm practices.

Glen Waites purchased his farm in 1956. He has raised hogs; grown wheat, soybeans, corn, cucumbers and tomatoes; and pioneered conservation techniques like

low-till and no-till. He and his wife, Marilyn, have five children and nine grandchildren. He has served on numerous boards and committees. Glen has been awarded the Soil Conservation Award and the Bicentennial Certificate of Merit from the province, and numerous others.

Dianne Colantonio grew up on the family farm in Lakeshore, where she became a third-generation farmer. She attended university and teachers' college. She is a past president of her local Women's Institute. She was involved in the 4-H for over 30 years. Dianne was not able to attend the ceremonies due to health issues. We wish her all the best.

We thank all this year's recipients and inductees—all the very best—and thank them for their contribution to agriculture.

READING CIRCLE

Ms. Soo Wong: This year is the 10th anniversary of Reading Circle, a community-based reading program I founded in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt when I was a TDSB trustee.

Since the beginning, this reading program has been held at Bridlewood public library for 90 minutes every Saturday, from October to May. Approximately 40 children, from junior kindergarten to grade 5, and 25 high school student volunteers participate. After reading one-on-one with their reading buddies, children do a range of activities, including writing, arts and crafts, puzzles and games, thus giving the children opportunities to develop their oral language and social skills.

Reading Circle is supported by dedicated local youth from high schools, the TDSB and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. This program enables the youth volunteers to earn their community service hours, as well as acquire leadership, teamwork and organizational skills.

As a first-generation Chinese Canadian, I know the importance of the Toronto Public Library in helping new Canadians, like my family, acquire English-language skills. Hence, I'm very pleased to see my weekly reading program grow year over year.

On April 23, Reading Circle will celebrate its 10th anniversary at the Bridlewood public library. I want to thank all the children, parents, volunteers, local high schools and the staff at the library for making this community reading program such a success. Together, we're giving new opportunities for children and youth of all ages to develop literacy skills and the joy of reading.

FARM SAFETY

Mr. Jim McDonell: Last month, Canadians had the opportunity to recall the importance of safety in our agriculture industry. Farms and the agriculture industry are the bedrock of our prosperity. The sector drives innovation, productivity and employment with an unyielding focus on quality. The agri-food sector is the largest employer in Ontario, providing highly skilled, well-paid and stable jobs across the province.

Farming, unfortunately, remains one of the riskiest professions in Canada. Through better technologies and smart regulations, we have made great progress. However, much more needs to be done.

My riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry is not immune to farm accidents. Over my lifetime, our family has been involved in numerous accidents, causing serious injuries. I lost a sister, a neighbour and a first cousin to farm accidents.

More recently, in late January, I lost a close friend to a farming accident: Alvin Runnalls, the former mayor of North Dundas, whom I had the privilege to sit with on county council. Alvin was a dedicated community worker involved in many associations, including the Dairy Farmers of Ontario.

Last month, tragedy struck our family again, when my son-in-law Roch lost his father in another farm accident. Marcel Brunet recently retired and, just weeks after celebrating his 60th birthday, lost his life doing something he truly loved doing: working with his son, Roch, on the farm on his days off. He had cut wood since his days as a young teenager, so the accident, like most farm accidents, was just an accident.

Marcel leaves a big hole in our family and in our community. He was a devoted volunteer in his parish and his community, serving on a number of committees. He was a go-to guy when his parishioners and his friends needed a hand or someone just to fill in.

Speaker, as you can see, Agriculture safety week touches too many families in Ontario, and we need to change that.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE RUN

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'm delighted to rise in the House today to acknowledge Hotel Dieu Hospital Child Development Centre's 20th annual fundraising run this past weekend in my riding of Kingston and the Islands. This event holds a special place in my heart. It is an event that truly does recharge my spirit and feed my soul, as I'm sure it does for the many people who come back year after year. Over 400 Kingstonians came out and helped raise more than \$28,000 for CDC.

The Child Development Centre is one of 21 specialized centres in Ontario offering critical services to children and youth who have physical, neurological or developmental disabilities such as cerebral palsy. For 42 years, the centre's physiotherapists, occupational and speech therapists, dietitians, doctors, counsellors and volunteers have provided outstanding service in our community.

I would also like to give a shout-out to a very special family, Mary, John and Braeden Young, who lost sweet, wee Bryleigh last fall. Bryleigh's face could light up any room, and this year her family gave away purple butterflies for children to wear to honour her memory and to encourage others to engage in acts of kindness. I know that her spirit touched many at the CDC run as well as the participants in the race.

Thank you, as well, for the excellent leadership of director Margaret Van Beers—for all your work to make this year's run a success, and of course every day of the year as well.

Janessa, Braden and Lochlan, you were fantastic ambassadors, by the way.

Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch. Thank you.

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TEL AVIV

Mrs. Gila Martow: This morning I had the absolute honour to welcome the mayor of Tel Aviv. His name is Ron Huldai. He was here to promote Tel Aviv—obviously, he wants us all to come visit—but he was here more with a group from the Canadian Committee for the Tel Aviv Foundation. You can find out more information at telavivfoundation.org. The three women who came with him were Orpaz Gibson, Margalit Navon and Erin Battat, and they're all from the Toronto region.

Basically, what they are doing is promoting donations and investments, and interest in what a vibrant place Tel Aviv is. Their dedication is focused on education, social services and welfare, the arts and culture, sports, the environment and quality of life. What the mayor said that was so interesting is that 6% of the Tel Aviv budget goes to arts and culture. Imagine that.

Tonight is the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee—CJPAC, as we commonly refer to it around the political world in Toronto—and there's going to be a lot of young professionals there, as well as a lot of professionals. I'm hoping to see a lot of my friends from both sides of the room there, celebrating the involvement of our Jewish youth and our Jewish young professionals in the political spectrum.

I'm glad that the mayor is going to make the party as well, and now I'm going to hold him to it.

VAISAKHI

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today marks a very special occasion for the Sikh community. In general in South Asia, April—and this time period—marks the harvest season of Vaisakh, or Vaisakhi. But for the Sikh community specifically, today, April 14, marks the celebration of Vaisakhi, or Khalsa Day, which marks the creation of the Khalsa.

Mr. Speaker, you're probably wondering, "What is the Khalsa?" The Khalsa was created by the 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, before he installed the Guru Granth Sahib as the final guru of the Sikhs.

"Khalsa" is defined as the "sovereign," or "people who are free." So today, in fact, is a celebration of our sovereignty, of the independent spirit of all people.

What the Khalsa was set to create was an order, or a family, that was committed to social justice, a family and an order that was committed to upholding principles and tenets that advanced equality and social justice. There was a caste system, which is oppressive, and there were

other ills in society, like superstitions, that kept people downtrodden, that kept people enslaved in their minds. The Khalsa was a way of uplifting people to achieve their own personal ambitions, their own personal potential, and to ensure that all society was able to achieve this potential for freedom, justice and equality.

Today we celebrate Vaisakhi. We celebrate the sovereignty in all of our souls and all of our spirits. I ask all of us to join in the celebration, which is truly the celebration of the human spirit.

EGLINTON CROSSTOWN LRT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I'm pleased to rise today and highlight the incredible transportation transformation that's under way in my riding of Scarborough Southwest. I'm talking about the Eglinton Crosstown LRT.

With construction well under way at the west end of the city, the dream of improving and modernizing public transit in my riding is closer than ever to being realized. Of the 25 new stations along the line, Scarborough Southwest will be seeing seven new stations opening, starting at O'Connor and running east all the way to Kennedy station. This means that close to 30% of these new stations will be in my riding, and I can't tell you how many positive comments I have received from my constituents.

Our government is taking action to improve our transit infrastructure in Toronto and, in fact, in all of Ontario. Ontario's transportation infrastructure is absolutely vital to the strength, stability and success of our province. Public transit helps our workforce get to the office. It helps our students get to the classroom. It allows our seniors to remain active and mobile in their later years. It helps businesses to flourish, and it helps residents to get where they need to go, when they need to be there.

I look forward to following the progress of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, and watching as it continues to benefit the residents and businesses of Scarborough Southwest and well beyond—in all of Ontario, in fact.

TORN MEMORIES OF NANKING

Mr. Bob Delaney: Japanese author Tamaki Matsuoka has written an important book about the Second World War's prolonged Sino-Japanese campaign. As importantly, Toronto Alpha, a largely Chinese group formed to document and spread the history of that long and brutal campaign, published the book, called *Torn Memories of Nanking*.

Author Matsuoka became a teacher in Japan in 1982 and began to look at the discrepancies between how history books in Japan and in the rest of the world treated the China-Japan campaign during World War II. In the late 1980s, Tamaki began to interview survivors and veterans of the battle for Nanking, now known as Nanjing. She wrote down first-hand accounts of Chinese survivors and Japanese soldiers who went on an extended killing spree of soldiers and civilians alike. It is a compelling

story for its brutal matter-of-factness and its meticulous documentation.

Often either denied or underplayed in Japan—Torn Memories of Nanking is the missing chapter in the documentation of World War II's longest campaign, in which an estimated 25 million Chinese were killed. Particularly because its author is Japanese, this disturbing book shines new light into World War II's largest remaining dark historical corner.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT (STRENGTHENING RETIREMENT SECURITY FOR ONTARIANS), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L'ONTARIO (SÉCURISER LA RETRAITE EN ONTARIO)

Ms. Hunter moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 186, An Act to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 186, Loi établissant le Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm proud to rise today to introduce this important bill. If passed, this bill will establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and ensure that the over four million Ontarians who do not currently have a workplace pension plan will be able to access a predictable stream of income in retirement, paid for life.

I'd like to thank all the members of my team and the ministry whose work has culminated in this bill and its introduction today, specifically those joining us in the House: Mahmood Nanji, the associate deputy minister of the ORPP Implementation Secretariat; Shemin Manji; Marc Sharrett; Luc Vaillancourt; Joel Gorlick; Ola Agboola; Dakila Proudfoot; Michael Coe, who is my chief of staff; David Gordon; Keesha Bell; Marilyn Preston; Clancy Zeifman; Tiff Blair; Alex Phillips, who is the senior policy lead in the Premier's office; and those who have joined them here today. Thank you so much for your excellent work.

MOTIONS

NISHAN SAHIB FLAG

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton on a point of order.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the ceremonial flagpole at the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I move that the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag be flown on the ceremonial flagpole today, April 14, and Monday, April 18.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just as a point: Motions don't come from the opposition; they come from the government. And a point of order—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm explaining, please.

A point of order is what has to happen in order for it to be recognized as a motion.

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PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I affix my signature and I give it to page Lauren.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

"Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

"Whereas the Ontario government is currently engaging in a public consultation to review and improve employment and labour laws in the province;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a decent work agenda by making sure that Ontario's labour and employment laws:

"—require all workers be entitled to a starting wage that reflects a uniform, provincial minimum, regardless of a worker's age, job or sector of employment;

"—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

"—ensure part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time, permanent counterparts;

"—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

"—support job security for workers when companies or contracts change ownership;

"—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temp agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

"—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

"—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

"—offer proactive enforcement of laws, supported by adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the law;

"—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

"—ensure all workers are paid at least \$15 an hour."

I couldn't agree more. I'm going to give it to Samantha to be delivered with my signature to the table.

MEN'S HEALTH

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas men's health is an integral component of population health, affecting Ontario families, communities, businesses and society;

"Whereas many men's health issues—if not all—benefit from early diagnosis, which is most often achieved through proactive monitoring of health and regular examinations;

"Whereas the stigma associated with a number of men's health issues, and the failure to conduct regular physical examinations, can be at least partially mitigated through increased public awareness and the sharing of personal stories;

"Whereas June is a special and significant month for men and their families, with the third Sunday in June recognized internationally as Father's Day;

"Whereas groups like the Canadian Men's Health Foundation are developing innovative tools and programs, like the YouCheck health awareness tool, that could be promoted during a dedicated awareness week;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support increased awareness and advocacy of men's health issues by working towards passage and adoption of Bill 170, An Act to proclaim the week immediately preceding the third Sunday in June as Men's Health Awareness Week."

As it's my bill, I fully agree with it and leave it with page Harry.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

"Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to Joshua.

PARENTAL RECOGNITION

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Madam Speaker, you look delightful, all decked out. I'm so pleased to see you there.

This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas in 2006, Ontario Justice Paul Rivard ruled that the Children's Law Reform Act and the Vital Statistics Act, which govern birth registries, were 'clearly outdated,' legislative reform has not followed;

"Whereas Ontario lags behind four other provinces—British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec—that have already updated their LGBTQ parental recognition laws;

"Whereas in this province, same-sex couples—in addition to any family who does not have a conventional biological father and mother set-up at birth—are forced to either adopt or receive a declaration of parentage to attain legal protections over their children;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Pass private member's Bill 137, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and other acts with respect to parental recognition."

I sign this on behalf of all those who are currently suing the Ontario government for this. I give it to Jerry, to be delivered to the table.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime;

"When public education about sexual violence and harassment is not prioritized, myths and attitudes informed by misogyny become prevalent. This promotes rape culture;...

"Sexual violence and harassment survivors too often feel revictimized by the systems set in place to support them. The voices of survivors, in all their diversity, need to be amplified;

"Survivors too often face wait times for counselling services as our population grows...;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Support the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment's final report, highlighting the need for inclusive and open dialogue to address misogyny and rape culture; educate about sexual violence and harassment to promote social change;... and address attrition rates within our justice system, including examining 'unfounded' cases, developing enhanced prosecution models and providing free legal advice for survivors."

I agree with this petition, I will affix my signature to it, and I will give it to page Cooper to bring down.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services ... which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that

protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Diluk.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas once you privatize hydro, there's no return; and

"We'll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

"We'll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

"We'll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what's happened elsewhere;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come."

Of course I agree with this. I'm going to sign my name and give it to Lauren to be delivered to the table.

CHILD CARE

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Madam Speaker, you look resplendent in your new Speaker's attire.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas many parents and caregivers are being charged non-refundable fees to place their children on wait-lists for daycare centres;

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"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees can range from tens to hundreds of dollars;

"Whereas due to the scarcity of quality daycare spaces, many parents and caregivers are forced to place their children on multiple wait-lists;

"Whereas non-refundable daycare wait-list fees impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care;

"Whereas daycare wait-lists are often administered in a non-transparent manner which creates the risk that they will be administered in an unfair and/or discriminatory manner;

"Whereas parents and caregivers in Ontario already face significant barriers accessing daycare due to high costs and limited numbers of daycare spaces;

"Whereas quality child care is a public good and not a commodity and the costs of child care should not operate on a supply-and-demand basis;

"Whereas there are currently no regulations in place to prevent daycares from charging parents and caregivers exploitative fees;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that we have a responsibility to take action now, and support a requirement for transparent administration of daycare wait-lists and a ban on non-refundable daycare wait-list fees."

I agree with this petition. I sign it and leave it with Maya.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas demonstrative schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs; and

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstrative schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstrative schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas the freezing of student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind;

"Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstrative schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I'm happy to affix my signature and give this to page Jack.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS ÉLÈVES AYANT DES BESOINS PARTICULIERS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait plaisir de présenter la pétition.

"Whereas provincial and demonstration schools in Ontario provide education programs and services for students with special education needs;

"Whereas there are four provincial and three demonstration schools for anglophone deaf, blind, deaf-blind and/or severely learning-disabled students, ainsi qu'une école pour les étudiants francophones qui sont sourds, aveugles, sourds-aveugles et/ou" qui ont des problèmes d'apprentissage sérieux;

"Whereas, even with early identification and early intervention, local school boards are not equipped to handle the needs of these students, who are our most vulnerable children;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"(a) oppose the closure of provincial and demonstration schools and recognize that these specialized schools are the last hope for many children;

"(b) stop the enrolment freeze at these schools in order for students and their families, who have exhausted all other available resources, to have access to equal education for themselves without added costs, to which they, like all students, are entitled to."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to it and ask Chandise to bring it to the Clerk.

MEN'S HEALTH

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas men's health is an integral component of population health, affecting Ontario families, communities, businesses and society;

"Whereas many men's health issues—if not all—benefit from early diagnosis, which is most often achieved through proactive monitoring of health and regular examinations;

"Whereas the stigma associated with a number of men's health issues, and the failure to conduct regular physical examinations, can be at least partially mitigated through increased public awareness and the sharing of personal stories;

"Whereas June is a special and significant month for men and their families, with the third Sunday in June recognized internationally as Father's Day;

"Whereas groups like the Canadian Men's Health Foundation are developing innovative tools and programs, like the YouCheck health awareness tool, that could be promoted during a dedicated awareness week;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To support increased awareness and advocacy of men's health issues by working towards passage and adoption of Bill 170, An Act to proclaim the week immediately preceding the third Sunday in June as Men's Health Awareness Week."

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name to it and hand it over to page Madeline.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Madam Speaker, congratulations on your new position.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas demonstrative schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstrative schools and other special

education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstrative schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

"Whereas this situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstrative schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I affix my signature to this and hand it to page MacFarlane.

YAD VASHEM

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each caucus to speak and recognize Yad Vashem, with the member for York Centre reciting a prayer in Yiddish, following which a moment of silence will be observed.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is there unanimous consent that up to five minutes be allotted to each caucus to speak and recognize Yad Vashem, with the member for York Centre reciting a prayer in Yiddish, following which a moment of silence will be observed? Agreed? All right.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: Today at Queen's Park, we recognized and honoured 12 Holocaust survivors who overcame incredible odds of survival during World War II. We heard their stories of anguish, suffering and immense loss and how they were able to triumph over the horrors they faced.

Today, we honoured Felicia Carmelly, Henry and Reny Friedman, Helene Goldflus, Michael Mason, Zuzana Sermer, Adam and Rachel Shtibel, Elsa Thon, Mannie Weinberg and Freda Weisfeld-Peck.

After surviving the Holocaust, they came to this province to rebuild their lives, and we honour them for the wonderful contributions each of them has made as citizens of Ontario.

This day, we also recognize Yom ha-Shoah V'Hagvurah, Holocaust Memorial Day, a day designated for Holocaust remembrance in communities around the world. This is the 23rd year that the Ontario Legislature has observed Holocaust Memorial Day, and I'm immensely proud to say that Ontario was the first jurisdiction in the world, outside of the state of Israel, to officially recognize this day.

As we mourn the deaths of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, we also celebrate the lives of

those who survived. I have visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial and museum in Jerusalem. The memorial is dedicated to preserving the memory and the story of each of the six million people who died. As a Jew, I can tell you that no matter how many times I've been there, the memories strike your heart and your soul.

Every Jew is touched by the Holocaust. We lost loved ones, family members or friends. Every Jewish person lost someone, and the Holocaust echoes through generations. The loss is extraordinary. At Yad Vashem, that loss is made real. It is concrete. You can touch it.

In the Valley of the Communities, you stand before wall after wall, carved out of solid rock, listing the name of more than 5,000 communities that lived, breathed and had life, in which men and women loved, married, raised children, worked, laughed and worshipped. Today, in most cases, nothing remains of these Jewish communities except for their names, forever frozen in the bedrock of Yad Vashem. It was there that I found the names of the Polish city where my father was born, Częstochowa, and the Polish city where my mother was born, Sosnowiec.

The Holocaust reaches out of the past and touches the shoulder of every Jew. For years, survivors walked amongst us with tattoos to mark the horror they lived through. Their stories, their scars and the numbers that were so callously carved into their skin made the Holocaust real, personal, powerful and unforgettable. Now, there are fewer and fewer survivors who are still with us. There are not as many people who can give first-hand accounts of that brutal period in history.

1340

The central theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2016 is "The Struggle to Maintain the Human Spirit." During the Holocaust, in the Nazi death camps where Jews were isolated, cut off, singled out and starved, and where the basic necessities of life were stripped away, brutal acts were a daily occurrence, and life and death existed in such close proximity that many Jews naturally focused their efforts on their own physical survival and that of their loved ones. Yet simultaneously, some Jews attempted to preserve a life that was grounded in moral values and having a cultural dimension befitting a decent society.

Alongside externally imposed hunger, humiliation and isolation, the Jewish ghettos also contained self-initiated organizations for mutual aid and support, medical care and cultural activities. Jews arranged secret study groups to help educate Jewish children, who were prohibited from attending schools. They covertly wrote and distributed articles, and held theatrical and musical performances, literary evenings and lectures.

Evidence of spiritual, artistic and intellectual activity could be found even behind the barbed wire of the camps. For example, at a labour camp in Germany in 1944, Jewish women wrote down poetry from memory on pieces of paper using pencils gathered painstakingly from the ruins of the bombed-out buildings where they worked. Clearly, activities such as these helped the Jewish prisoners temporarily transcend their extreme hardships.

Writing and artwork were also used as a means to preserve the freedom of the human spirit. Many Jews documented their lives as a way to vent their feelings or preserve the memory of the tragedy for future generations.

Many of those who struggled to maintain the human spirit did not survive the horrors of the Holocaust, but their determination and deeds are a reminder to us and future generations of the stamina and nobility of the human spirit.

Tragically, other genocides have followed since World War II in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia. It's evident that we must continue our struggle to keep alive the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the United Nations 67 years ago in the shadow of the Holocaust. The declaration recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace throughout the world. It called on the world to protect human rights by the rule of law.

We are fortunate to live in such a great country, where our human rights and freedoms are extended and protected by law. But we must never take our rights and freedoms for granted, and we must remind ourselves how easy it can be to lose them.

On Yom ha-Shoah, Jewish communities around the world recite a brief traditional mourner's prayer, the Kaddish. I want to continue our tradition of saying the Kaddish in memory of those people whose *yahrzeit* is unknown. On behalf of the victims, survivors and their families, I would like to recite that Hebrew prayer, which is something for which all people may pray, as is our custom. I ask for unanimous consent to allow me to do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I believe it has been moved, member for York Centre.

I ask everyone to stand for a moment of silence.

Prayer in Hebrew.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I would like to add that one line in this prayer translates as, "He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us."

We must always remember so that the world will never forget. Thank you.

Mrs. Gila Martow: A very pertinent theme of the Holocaust is timelessness. Genocide is a crime that transcends time in that the social realities that enable it—the economic isolation and the political marginalization—are laid out well before the crime occurs. Conversely, the damage and the pain inflicted is felt long after the crime is perpetrated. Loss of loved ones, the endless trauma, survivor's guilt and the endless tormenting are complex moral, theological and philosophical issues that perpetually plague a people following a timeless tragedy such as the Holocaust.

To comprehend the scale of this genocide, especially in a so-called civilized western European context, is no small task as it demands that we as humanity delve into, and push ourselves to explore the true meaning of evil.

Yad Vashem is an interactive walk-through museum dedicated to the Holocaust and the timelessly vexing questions it poses to historians, theologians, politicians and humanity. As the one million annual visitors will attest, it is a truly unique experience.

While tragedy or, more appropriately, an atrocity like genocide is timeless, people are not. In only a few short years, Ontario, Canada, Israel and the rest of the world will lose the last Holocaust survivors. There will be nobody to accompany Jewish youth on March of the Living trips to revisit the ghettos and the concentration camps. There won't remain people to recall first-hand the horrors of Nazi death camps, and transmit the emotion, the guilt, the anger or the confusion to the next generation.

This is why in recent years there has been such a strong imperative by Jewish groups to record memories and to preserve the record and testimony of what happened there. If the tragedy of the Holocaust is timeless in nature, then so ought to be the damage, in order to teach the lessons and ensure a future that honours the words "never again."

This is especially pertinent given the rampant ubiquity of technology in our world today. Yad Vashem offers a plethora of digitized material ranging from pedagogical tools for classroom use, academic journals, and digitized testimony of survivors.

The history of Hitler's rise to power and the horrors of the Holocaust are not an easy subject to learn. As my friend and the former head of CHAT's Jewish history department tells me—and it's no surprise to me—it's a difficult topic to teach. I'm pleased to know that the school to which I have sent my children, the Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto, has an updated grade 12 curriculum that includes a half-year course in Jewish history that focuses solely on the Holocaust. While Jewish students of all grade levels will learn about the Holocaust in a formal setting in senior year, the students are subjected to more complex themes of the history, including the social process by which one group of people is alienated, isolated and their essential worth delegitimized to the point of complete dehumanization. Ultimately, this transitions into more adult content of the history, like the specific methods of killing and the medical experimentation on captured, emaciated and disabled Jews in the ghettos and the camps. This allows students to explore the philosophical and ethical questions that the Holocaust has left us and to really begin to understand evil.

I want to really thank the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem, who are here, for recognizing each year the families of survivors—and, of course, the survivors themselves have to share their very difficult stories. It's difficult for us to hear those stories, repeat those stories—well, imagine what it was for them to live through those stories and then come back and share. Iris Weinberg is here with her family, and I just want to welcome her because she is from my riding of Thornhill.

I want to thank Yad Vashem and everyone who's here today for remembering the Holocaust, honouring the

memory of the survivors and the righteous. May we do so forever and through all time so that we may teach our children the timeless lessons of, and more importantly the difference between, evil and good.

1350

We have the word “yom.” It means “day” in the Jewish language. We have “Yom ha-Shoah,” where “Shoah” is the Holocaust, so it’s “The day of remembering the Holocaust.” Then we have “Yom Hazikaron,” where “zakar” is “to remember,” so it’s remembering people who have died in the wars in establishing the state of Israel and defending Jews.

We follow that by the happy day, which is “Yom Ha’atzmaut,” Israeli Independence Day, which we all look forward to. I’m hoping to celebrate in Israel, because I have only managed to be there for Yom Ha’atzmaut once in my life.

We have Passover, which is coming next week—Pesach. We say on Passover always, “Next year in Jerusalem.” We tell the story of the survival and the escape of the Jews from Egypt. It has been told for a millennium. Unfortunately, we have to all work together with groups like the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem to ensure that those life experiences continue to be told.

Just like when we sit down to read the book at the Seder—the Haggadah—we say, “Imagine yourself.” That’s what we’re told to do. You’re not just reading the story; you’re not just living in the year 2016. The first thing you’re supposed to do is transport yourself and almost be an actor, and pretend when you’re reading the Haggadah that you are the one who experienced this. It was almost understood at that time that that is the way to teach history, to force people to become the characters in the history lesson themselves and to learn that way. That’s the way people remember: through that emotion, because that emotion can be very powerful.

I just want to end on a happier note by saying that my name, “Gila,” means “joy” in Hebrew. I wish joy to everybody who is here today. We always look forward. I think that’s what makes the Jewish people so strong: that we’re always able to find humour and joy in every situation, no matter how horrific.

I wish everybody Chag Sameach—happy Passover. Thank you so much for sharing with us.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This afternoon I’m honoured to rise on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus, to pay tribute to Ontario Holocaust survivors. I want to note the presence beside me of my colleague Cheri DiNovo, co-author of the Jewish Heritage Month bill, and a person who has put herself forward in these matters in a substantial way.

I would like to recognize and thank the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem for their role in today’s proceedings and for their work providing education on the painful legacy of the Holocaust.

I also want to recognize all of the honourees who are present today. On behalf of my colleagues from Hamilton, I am particularly honoured to recognize Helene Goldflus from the Hamilton community, who is at

Queen’s Park today to be honoured as a survivor and for her commitment to Holocaust education. Her resolve to share her story has helped put a human face to this tragedy for a whole new generation of people.

I believe that it is important to recognize the important work that survivors continue to do in the Hamilton community and in all of our communities. Their work and their accomplishments are all the more remarkable given the unspeakable horrors they have endured. Their humanity in the face of such inhumanity is an inspiration to everyone. Their commitment to ensuring that we never forget is an incredibly noble one, and one that we all are very grateful for, because we can never forget the innocent victims of the Holocaust: an estimated six million Jews—a number that is almost impossible to comprehend—and two million Roma and Sinti also lost into the darkness, and the tens of thousands of others who were murdered, and the tens of millions of others who, like Helene, lost their homes and their family members and were forced to live for years in fear for their own lives. These are numbers on a scale that defies comprehension.

But we can only begin to understand when we consider that each person was a real person—real women, men and children, real families just like yours, just like mine, who were taken from their homes, separated from their families and killed simply for their faith, for who they were.

This was an unspeakable crime against humanity. It is a crime that must never be repeated. Today it serves as a powerful reminder that we must always be vigilant against the slow creep of hatred, racism, and intolerance, and that we of this generation must never repeat Canada’s shameful behaviour in the 1930s and 1940s—as was outlined in Irving Abella’s searing, honest and frightening book, *None is Too Many*—when Canada turned away those who were trying to flee the Holocaust and sent them back to their deaths. We must never, ever repeat that in this country.

It is thanks to the work of survivors and their families that these stories are not forgotten, so that our children will never have to live through the horrors that they did or be complicit, as this country was at one time.

On behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus, I want to once again express our gratitude and thanks to all of the honourees.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Could we all rise for a moment of silence, please?

The House observed a moment’s silence.

SIGN-LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I believe that you’ll find we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the use of sign-language interpreters in the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I move that sign-language interpreters may be present on the floor of the chamber to interpret the proceedings during debate on private member's notice of motion number 66.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

VISITORS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to recognize the member from Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Point of order, Madam Speaker: I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of Jennifer Stone, mother of page Cooper Stone—she is also a constituency assistant in my office; we work together—as well as Renee Albert, who is a co-op student in my constituency office. Welcome.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT (SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES (COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE SUR L'AIDE SOCIALE)

Mr. Paul Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission / Projet de loi 185, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des Services sociaux et communautaires afin de créer la Commission de recherche sur l'aide sociale.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Hamilton has moved second reading of Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission.

Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank you for my new title of Mr. Hamilton.

1400

Speaker, I'm delighted to welcome to the Legislature today many people who have taken time out of their busy day to travel all the way up here from Hamilton to show their support for this bill. I'll name some of them: Tony Lemma; Wendell Fields; Katrina Gervais; Sandy Leyland; Hannah Gervais; Rhonda Castello; Sarah

Guinta; Gord Jackson; Danielle Kudd; Shyda Thompson; William Tim Button; Arlene MacDonald; Brandon Boragno; John Mills; Archibald Walker; Helen Hutton; Laura Cattari, who spoke at our press conference yesterday; Jodi Dean; Jen Chivers; Victoria Gooding; and Jodi Dean Gooding.

I want to especially recognize Tom Cooper of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. Tom is a tireless advocate for those in need. In fact, Tom's presentation to the pre-budget consultations in Hamilton last January was one of the spurs for this bill making it here today. He has been pushing for evidence-based social assistance rates for over a decade.

I also want to extend my immense gratitude to Craig Foye. Craig is a staff lawyer with the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic who has contributed hugely to the bill we are debating today. The idea for the bill originated with Craig 10 years ago. He produced the original draft that led to the bill that was introduced in 2007. More than anyone else, this bill is thanks to the creativity, hard work and passionate advocacy of Craig.

I also want to recognize and acknowledge the current Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for introducing the precursor of this bill, Bill 235, back in 2007.

Thank you also to Anita Khanna for speaking about this bill at our press conference yesterday, and to everyone who has offered their valuable input on this bill, including Jennefer Laidley of the Income Security Advocacy Centre, Nancy Vander Plaats of the ODSP Action Coalition, the NDP's own Jonah Schein and our researcher Karalena McLean. Thank you, as well, for the excellent work on this bill by legislative counsel Liron Taub.

Speaker, social assistance rates in Ontario suffered severe cuts under Mike Harris that have never been reversed by the current Liberal government. Real, inflation-adjusted rates are substantially lower today than they were prior to 1996. They have been on a steady downward trend for the last two decades. Currently, rates are set arbitrarily without any reference to the real cost of living. As a result, recipients are mired in deep poverty, and they struggle to access nutritious food and adequate shelter. We cannot allow programs as critical as income security to be polarized and politicized.

To take the politics out of social assistance, this bill proposes that an expert independent panel should recommend rates based on the best evidence of what it really costs to live in Ontario and in our communities.

At the 2016 pre-budget consultations in Hamilton, both the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction recommended an arm's-length social assistance rates board to assess adequacy based on the actual cost of living in Ontario regions, and to provide advice on the levels of income support required for people to live in good health and dignity. Other groups echoed this call in other consultations around the province, including the ODSP Action Coalition, the Income Security Advocacy Centre and Legal Assistance of Windsor/Community Legal Aid.

Many of these organizations have been asking for this for years.

It just shows you, Speaker, how important public input is on the budget of this province. The people who testify have expertise and personal experience in how government policy affects their lives every day. They know all too well its failures and its inadequacies, and they also have imaginative and smart ideas on how to correct them. If only this government had been willing to listen to them before. Fortunately, my NDP colleagues and I were listening. The proof can be seen in this bill today.

Speaker, the majority of unemployed workers in Ontario are not eligible for EI benefits. People don't realize this, and this misunderstanding is but one of the many sources of the negative and ill-founded stereotypes against people struggling to survive on social assistance. The EI system is particularly poorly adapted to the realities of precarious work in our province and our urban centres. In Toronto, less than 20% of unemployed workers are eligible for EI, and with nowhere else to turn, it's no surprise that so many of them are forced to rely on social assistance in order to survive.

Decisions on social assistance rates have the most profound consequences for the lives of over 900,000 Ontarians. Over 900,000 people in this province rely on Ontario Works or ODSP, but more than half of these families don't have enough to eat.

Why has this happened, Speaker? Isn't social assistance supposed to provide a secure safety net to prevent people from falling into destitution and to ensure that even the least fortunate in our society have the resources to access adequate shelter, eat sufficient and nutritious food, clothe themselves and live in health and a little bit of dignity?

Again, why has this happened? First, obviously there were cuts in the 1990s, but the real cause is that the rates are arbitrary and are set by the political whim of the government of the day. There is no process in place. There is no framework, no research and no evidence behind decision-making at this time.

Social assistance rates are not indexed to inflation. Social assistance rates are not connected to the cost of living. With the exception of a flat northern supplement, social assistance rates do not recognize the very different costs of living in the very different communities in this vast province.

People receiving social assistance are living on below-subsistence incomes. In my own city of Hamilton, 75% to 80% of the people turning to food banks are in receipt of provincial social assistance. They should be able to afford food.

Children who grow up hungry suffer lasting ill effects on their health. They don't concentrate as well as in school as their peers. They are more likely to end up with preventable chronic diseases, such as asthma or diabetes, and they internalize the shame and social stigma that goes along with being poor. Even a short time spent in poverty compromises their educational and employment outcomes. The inadequacies of our social assistance

system are robbing children of their equal opportunity to succeed and they are perpetuating inequalities that will resonate for decades and through generations.

Speaker, I'm sure many of my colleagues saw the article in the Toronto Star this morning—how timely—which told us that among the world's richest countries, Canada is one of the more unequal societies for children. I quote from the article citing the UNICEF report:

"The growing gaps suggest that life is becoming more difficult for the most excluded children as social inequality has widened, and it is showing up in their physical and mental health...."

"Failure to address such crucial disparities creates lasting economic and social divisions that reverberate at great cost for generations."

We know that this doesn't have to be the way it is. Other provinces and countries have implemented highly effective policies to reduce poverty and food insecurity, particularly among children. In fact, we have an example that operates in this province, under the jurisdiction of the federal government, where incomes are indexed to the cost of living. It's called CPP, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. It's an excellent poverty reduction program targeted for seniors.

It's so effective that seniors have the lowest rate of food insecurity in Canada, even lower than adults in employment. As a result, turning 65 drops the risk of food insecurity by half for lower-income adults in Canada.

But it makes you wonder, Speaker, why are our income support programs for the under-65s so inadequate? Is there anything special about the number 65 instead of 64? Why do we have a system where a 64-year-old in Ontario can live in grinding poverty and, once they hit that 65th birthday, we double our efforts to ensure they live healthy and with dignity? This isn't a system informed by research, by evidence or by morality, if you really look at it.

What you find in effective poverty reduction strategies everywhere, like our programs for seniors, is that benefits are set at levels sufficient to cover basic needs. They are based on evidence and research. That is exactly what we need in our social assistance program: evidence-based rates.

Too many people in this chamber and in this government have not lived the experience of poverty. They don't understand what it's like to not have fresh fruit or vegetables, or to not socialize because they can't afford shampoo one week, or a cup of coffee.

That's why it's so important to listen to people who do have that direct, lived experience. That's why the social assistance research commission will have at least one member with direct, lived experience of Ontario Works, and one member with direct, lived experience on ODSP. We want this panel to be both expert and representative. We want it to be independent and we want its reports and recommendations to be public because it is critical that the public has access to the evidence on which important decisions such as these are made, both to inform the public debate and to hold the government accountable.

1410

None of the members of this Legislature, I would think, have the expertise or experience necessary to be deciding the incomes of 900,000 of the poorest people in our province, but that's what is currently happening. Instead, I would like the government and the members of the House to be provided with recommendations and advice based on the best expertise and experience available so they can make informed decisions.

One of the additional features of this bill is that it utilizes the expertise of the existing commission to periodically explore some of the other aspects of social assistance policies, such as how they interact with precarious work, child support payments and workplace injury benefits. If you already have expertise, why not leverage it for the maximum benefit of the public? It would be wasteful not to, or to spend time and money establishing another one-time, single-purpose body. The need is clear to explore the interactions. Take our increasingly precarious labour market, which makes it easy for people to fall into the social assistance system but harder than ever to make a re-entry into permanent, secure employment.

How often in this place do we have the opportunity to effect real change and to improve the lives and prospects of almost one million people, to help them towards health, dignity and a brighter future? This is but a foot-step on the long road to ending poverty, Speaker, but it is an important one.

I hope that all my colleagues on both sides of the House and aisles will support it today and ensure that the bill gets to committee. A society is judged on how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. Let us be judged favourably today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the Minister for Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and congratulations on your new position and your wonderful attire today.

I would like to thank the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek for bringing his bill forward. I think it is a very important conversation that we need to have this afternoon. At the outset, the member did reference the draconian cuts made by the previous Conservative government. Certainly, over the last number of years, we have been trying to incrementally improve the rates as they relate to those on social assistance, and we have commissioned previous reports on this very important subject.

I'm sure everyone will remember that Frances Lankin, a former NDP member of this House, as well as Munir Sheikh, issued their report in 2012 with a number of recommendations. In fact, over the last several years, we have been following those recommendations, in particular for single individuals on OW. We have been increasing their rates, in particular. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and so we have now increased those rates by some 34% since we became government.

In this year's budget, we made the particularly important change to our system that child support payments will no longer be clawed back. This is going to make a significant difference for those single individuals who rely on child support to ensure that their child has some of the requirements as they grow older, whether they're able to access a little bit more in terms of learning opportunities or recreation and so on. This is something that was recommended through my many meetings with people in organizations such as the ODSP Action Coalition. We take their advice; we value their advice.

Also, as a government, we want to look at social assistance as not just an issue of rates—a very important part of the whole picture, of course—but we also want to look across a number of different areas that are important for all low-income Ontarians. I'm speaking of issues around employment incentives, training, getting closer to the labour market and the very important area of housing. Just as we did with the dental program for low-income children, Healthy Smiles, we wish to expand that to other health benefits and, over time, to move to those sorts of benefits being available to adults as well.

So we are developing a broad consensus with our stakeholders that we need to move ahead in a whole-of-government approach. This is what we intend to do in the next year.

We're making other improvements in terms of simplifying some of the rules around social assistance, as well, things like not requiring disability adjudication when a child with a developmental disability becomes an adult. We're waiving that requirement. We're reviewing the entire disability adjudication process with a view to simplifying it.

We will not require medical reviews to the extent that was previously required.

We're going to be introducing things like a reloadable debit card that people can use for their services when they do not have a bank account, so they do not have to use payday loan institutions to cash their welfare cheques—a number of simple things.

However, having said all that, I applaud the member for bringing this forward. We know that the former Minister of Community and Social Services, now the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, had a very similar idea a number of years ago, and I think your advice in this regard is very good. I want to thank you for introducing your bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Perth—Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'll be sharing my time with the member from York-Simcoe and the member from Whitby-Oshawa.

I'm pleased to rise today to join in the debate on Bill 185, the Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission), introduced by the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

Over the last six months, I've had the opportunity to learn a great deal about the government's social assist-

ance system. I have heard from individuals receiving support through Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program, as well as from agencies advocating for changes to these programs. In my riding of Perth-Wellington, we frequently work with individuals who need assistance navigating the system. Now I hear stories from people across the province.

I am interested by the ideas put forward by the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek. I know that a lot of hard work has gone into the premise of this bill over the last number of years, and that poverty advocates in the Hamilton area have paved the way for the introduction of at least one other very similar bill.

Bill 185 will allow the creation of a social assistance research commission which will be responsible for recommending social assistance rates and social assistance policy ideas. I think that involving current or past social assistance recipients on a commission of this type is a positive step. Who knows the struggles and needs of individuals receiving social assistance better than those who have been in their shoes?

I understand that this bill is intended to remove political influence from social assistance rates. However, I am not convinced that this will be the outcome with this government in power. Despite the experts who will most likely make up this commission, there is no obligation for this government to implement their recommendations.

We need look no further than the Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario report to see the way this government cherry-picks report recommendations. I have 15 pages of recommendations from that report that show how this government just picks and chooses as they wish.

The Brighter Prospects report was thorough and very well-researched. However, even one of its authors has commented that the government has failed to accept and implement recommendations from the report. Why would we believe that the government would treat the recommendations of this commission any differently? Ultimately, the government can do whatever it wants, commission or no commission.

Let's look at this government's history when it comes to helping those on social assistance. For me, the first thing that comes to mind is the \$290 million they wasted on SAMS. This new system has caused nothing but problems for caseworkers and social assistance recipients. Just think about how far that money would have gone for those who really needed it. Instead, this government wasted it. They made a decision to go ahead with a system they knew wasn't ready. That's your government at work.

The goal is to improve the social assistance system. I believe we need to look no further than the agencies already doing the groundwork who have been making recommendations to the government for years.

In Perth-Wellington we have outstanding organizations with staff who dedicate themselves to improving our communities. We have agencies like the United Way Perth-Huron, our local Perth health units and their

boards, the local community food centre, food banks, churches, poverty action coalitions and dedicated volunteers in all of these organizations. Many have contacted me to share their recommendations to address poverty and improve social assistance. I have brought these recommendations to the government's attention time and time again, but we have seen little action.

1420

All this is to say that the recommendations are out there. There are organizations in every community in this province that have shared with the government ways to improve social assistance. I say to the members opposite: Listen to them. It seems that this government has a commission or panel for every issue under the sun, yet somehow their waste, mismanagement and scandal still run rampant.

Again, I stress that I think the best thing this government could do is listen to the advice they're already receiving. They need to stop wasting money on projects that don't work and actually invest in the people who need it. They need to address skyrocketing hydro costs, home heating costs and gasoline costs that are hurting everybody, particularly the most vulnerable in our communities. They need to rethink things like the ORPP and the cap-and-trade plan that will leave families and individuals with even less.

A commission could make a lot of good recommendations, but the government already knows what they need to do. We tell them every single day. Unless they decide to act and address these underlying issues, all the recommendations in the world won't make a shred of difference.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a great honour for me to rise today to speak on behalf of my constituents in London West to the private member's bill from my colleague the member for Hamilton East-Stoney Creek.

This bill, Bill 185, is an important bill. I think we all recognize that here today, and I am hopeful that by the end of this debate we will all support this bill moving forward. From our perspective, as an NDP caucus, it is a critical complement to the NDP's commitment to a \$15 minimum wage, which was a policy platform that we announced several weeks ago and that we will be moving forward with. Minimum wage, social assistance: These are all key tools to enable people to move forward to get out of poverty and create decent lives for themselves.

The idea that's proposed in this bill—to establish a social assistance research commission—is an idea that has been around this place for close to a decade now. It's a decade during which we have seen the 900,000 Ontarians who rely on social assistance fall further and further behind, trapped in a cycle of generational poverty that they are unable to break out of because our social assistance rates, our Ontario Works rates and Ontario Disability Support Program rates are not keeping up anywhere near to the cost of inflation and have come nowhere close to making up for the huge reduction in rates that we saw under the Harris government.

As my colleague said, this idea was broached once more during the pre-budget consultations that the Liberal government had. Unfortunately, they wrote their budget before the consultation was complete, but had they listened to the stakeholders and the organizations who came to present to the committee, they would have heard this idea come forward again. The time to act is now. We've waited too long to move forward on this.

There are three key aspects of the bill, Speaker, that I want to focus on in particular, that make it such a valuable and worthwhile initiative. The first is that it is evidence-based. As many members know, before I was elected in this House, I was a policy researcher, so I certainly know the importance of using research and data to inform policy. Some of you may have attended the reception that the Council of Ontario Universities held a couple of months ago called Research Matters. These are researchers who are using research to make policy recommendations to move forward on public policy goals. They had identified 50 game-changing discoveries that were made by university researchers over the last century—50 discoveries over the last century.

One of these was the groundbreaking research by David Hulchanski called *The Three Cities Within Toronto*. David Hulchanski, a U of T researcher, looked at 35 years of census data within the city of Toronto, looking at the distribution of income inequality. What he found over those 35 years was a dramatic shrinking of the middle class. In 1970, the middle class made up 66% of the city of Toronto; in 2005, only 29%. At the same time, there was a huge increase in low income: 19% in 1970 and 53% in 2005. Looking at the data, looking at the evidence can really help to understand what is happening to people who are living in poverty in this province.

I also wanted to read from a letter that I received from Neighbourhood Legal Services in London and Middlesex. They point out that for too long provincial social assistance rates have been at the mercy of political whim and poisonous, negative stereotypes that are not based in actual research. They call on MPPs to help change this and create a legacy of evidence-based social policy for the people of Ontario.

The second key aspect of this bill is the provision to include lived experience, to acknowledge, to honour the lived experience of people who have felt poverty, who have had to deal with the impact of poverty. I have never lived in poverty myself, but I did participate in a poverty simulation that was organized by the Middlesex-London Health Unit. It is incredibly powerful to understand how difficult it is to live in poverty, how difficult it is to access the services that are available in the community when you're living hand to mouth, when you're trying to do everything you can to send your kids to school, to make sure they have lunch, to get tickets to go on the bus, to visit the food bank or wherever you need to go. We need to have those voices of survivors at the table.

The third piece that I wanted to talk about is the fact that it is place-based. In my community, just a couple of

weeks ago, London's road map to end poverty was released. That acknowledges that poverty is a reflection of what's going on in the community. There was good data that was released as part of that road map that told us that London's poverty rates are much higher than the provincial average, which is why we need to take a place-based approach. That's why I support my colleague's bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I, too, am very pleased to rise and speak on the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek's bill. The concept of a social assistance research commission is a very good one. I know it's been around for the past 10 years. An evidence-based, science-based opportunity to set rates and assist people in having a dignified life is a very important one.

In fact, it was the third plank that I put out to the community shortly after being elected in 2014 that I would focus on in my commitment to the people of Beaches–East York: I would focus on addressing social inequality issues, particularly around housing, income and food security issues. So I will be supporting this PMB, because I do believe it's a good idea that we study social assistance.

The Minister of Community and Social Services commented on the Frances Lankin report. I remember during the campaign in 2014 waving that report around because, as you know, Frances Lankin represented my area. At the time it was Beaches–Woodbine, and now it's Beaches–East York. She represented that area, and she was a great advocate of social equality in our community. I share that advocacy; I share that passion that she had.

In my constituency office, it's obviously a very important component of what my staff and I are working on on a regular basis. I've repeatedly come across this disconnect with OW and ODSP, where the housing portion of what recipients can expect goes up at a lot slower rate under social assistance than it does under the rental tribunal guidelines, so that they're seeing private landlords putting rents up in buildings that they're in faster than we're allowing them. There is a disconnect there between government policies. I know that if we do some evidence-based research, we can help get that right.

1430

Speaker, I would like to comment on the fact that I'm a little disappointed in the member and I'm a little disappointed in his caucus. I know him to be sincere in his concern for social equality issues, but they had a chance. That caucus over there had a chance to support a budget, just yesterday, that was extraordinarily progressive, which made great inroads in addressing exactly the kinds of issues that are—but they voted against it. They voted against free tuition—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: You're selling Hydro. Great inroad.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, you know—you know—that there's a speaker right now, so I'm going to ask the members to refrain from shouting

across at each other. Okay? If I hear him again—you know who you are—you'll be warned.

I'm going to return back to the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Again, I've struck a nerve.

The member for Toronto–Danforth has been tweeting at me that he voted against this budget because we're "kicking kids off autism wait-lists"—his words—that we're "selling off #hydro1"—his words—and that this is resulting in "hospital cuts." Well, it just isn't true. We are taking kids off the list and giving them \$8,000 as a transitional measure until they get into better autism programs. We're putting in \$333 million more to look after children in new programs. So they are misrepresenting that to people on that one plank.

On the second plank, we know that they don't agree with the notion of selling off Hydro One, but we know it's the right thing to do to reinvest that money in new infrastructure, and we're doing that.

On the third—hospital cuts—we are transforming health care in this province. Yes, hospitals aren't going to be doing as much work as they may have in the past, but the reality is that there will be greater health care. The budgets are going up. We're investing in community-based health care, and that's extremely important.

It would have been much more effective, I believe—you could have had it both ways: You could have supported the budget which helped the most needy, the most vulnerable in our community, and we could have moved forward with this kind of review.

The most important piece for me, Speaker, is that in this budget we had a pilot for a guaranteed annual income. This is transformational. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek spoke of the federal system: guaranteed income supplements. We're looking to do that at the provincial level, but he turned it down; he didn't support it and he should have. It would have given a lot more credibility to his concerns on this file.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words about this particular bill.

Let me begin. There are a few things in the short time I have. Two things that I think are important to understand about this topic are that I agree with the member that it does need better research, and that I also believe in the fundamental notion that a job is the beginning point for getting out of poverty.

But I do want to correct the record: Members have made reference to the reorganization of the ODSP. The creation by Mike Harris of the ODSP was certainly to define those people who had special needs, who needed a different kind of social assistance. And the fact is that able-bodied men were the people who had reductions to their social assistance. It's always portrayed as if it also included single mothers with children—not so.

I want to come back here to the fact that societies have been struggling with the issue of poverty forever. But, as I pointed out, I think there's a need for better research.

When you look at the manner in which this government has handled this file, there are some glaring errors that I think have been made. First of all, the most charitable thing we can call the whole SAMS fiasco is "clumsy." The wasted \$290 million is certainly something I think could have been better spent.

I look at the agencies being offered the opportunity to work with this government at \$50 million. When we inquired into what would be the criteria, how you would measure the success and the outcome, we were told that the agency itself would set the outcome and they would set the criteria in order to apply for the grant.

This government has also created huge barriers in terms of the cost of living. When you look at the increased costs—whether it's hydro, heat or food—we're certainly looking at some major obstacles.

I'm conscious of the time.

I want to make reference, on the research side, to that material that was provided on poverty a few years ago by the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity. What was key to their approach to poverty was this: Which groups are most likely at risk, and how did they get there? It's that kind of research and science that I think needs to be looked at. I would recommend to the member, in looking at matching the needs of these specific groups, what they need to help them.

Finally, on the ORPP, let us not forget that this piece of legislation actually triggers a clawback of OAS and GIS, the federal opportunities. They would trigger that because they would earn more than that allows for.

In conclusion, I would say that this is an area in which probably all three parties have significant opportunity, or should, to provide input into a very important issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The honourable member from Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First, I want to commend the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for bringing this forward. It has been a while since we've talked about poverty in this place, and we should be talking about it more.

I want to talk about my own personal story, because I did live on social assistance. I was a 15-year-old who left a very violent home. I witnessed the suicide of my stepfather. The streets were safer. I lived on the streets for a while. I remember the day when I qualified for social assistance—we called it welfare back then—because I decided at that point that I wanted to go back and finish my schooling and get my high school equivalent. I actually got a doctor's note and got social assistance.

Back then, in the 1960s and 1970s, guess what? You could live on social assistance. I rented a basement apartment, as a kid. I paid for books. I paid for food. That was not ODSP. That was OW, or the equivalent of OW.

Some interesting historical facts, by the way: Under the Bill Davis government, the Tories raised social assistance rates 82%, so this isn't even a partisan issue. The Liberals, under Peterson, raised them 52%. We raised them 18% under Rae. It wasn't until Mike Harris that it took the downfall that got us to this place.

The Liberal government, in 13 years—contradicting the member from Beaches–East York—has done nothing to raise them. In fact, in real dollars, they have fallen significantly. The poor are poorer now than they were under Mike Harris. Shame on the Liberal government.

Today, can you live on social assistance? Absolutely not. If you're living on OW, at around \$600 a month, especially in downtown Toronto, you are on the street, and lucky if you can find a shelter. You have to use a food bank. You are living under the poverty line.

If they talk, across the aisle, about wanting to do something about poverty, here's solution number 1: Raise the rates. Yes.

Solution number 2: a minimum wage that's above the poverty line, a \$15-per-hour minimum wage.

Solution number 3: Actually put some money into housing, which we haven't seen for a long time. We have 178,000 families in Ontario waiting an average of 10 to 12 years for affordable housing. New bills, inclusionary zoning—which we heard about but we haven't seen any bill yet, Madam Speaker—rent supplements, real rent control: We need housing.

If the government did those three things, guess what would happen to the poverty rate? It would go down. Yes, we need evidence-based research and, more to the point, we need action on poverty, finally. After decades, we need action.

I have to say that it is absolutely an ethical and moral imperative that not only do we look at OW rates—but the fact that we keep people who live with a disability, who cannot work, living below the poverty line is absolutely shameful in a country and in a jurisdiction this wealthy. That is shameful—and they do. People who cannot work: We insist they live in poverty.

1440

To anybody here who attends any kind of religious service, I would say: How can you say you are a faithful Christian, Jew, Muslim, Sikh or anything, and come into this place and not act to at least alleviate those who have a disability who have to live in grinding poverty? You're not a faithful person, if you do that.

Just to wrap up: What do we need? Yes, at the very least, we need to pass the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek's bill. More to the point, this has taken 10 years to get here. That's disgraceful. If you pass it today, get it to committee and make it law, I warrant that that commission will come back and say three things: Raise the rates and the minimum wage above the poverty line; let's get some housing built and let's get some housing provided; and—goodness gracious me—for those who live with disabilities in this province, get them out of grinding poverty. That's the ethical to do. That's the moral thing to do. That's the only thing to do. Let's get it done.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Just like the other members in this Legislature, I would hope that the amendments established by Bill 185 will serve to improve the lives of those

on social assistance. It's one of the reasons why I will be supporting it.

But I do have some concerns with some aspects—and the member from Perth–Wellington alluded to the Lankin–Sheikh report from 2012. Many of the recommendations set out in that report were never implemented by this government. I would trust, Madam Speaker, that the recommendations of a new commission would meet with greater implementation success.

One of the concerns that I have is that the bill will create yet another costly level of bureaucracy. I would hope that, once established, the new commission will make recommendations for the people who desperately need support, and further hope that the government will accept those recommendations.

Speaker, we also know that this Liberal government has a long history of ignoring commission recommendations with which they disagree—don't they? Although there remains a pervasive scepticism, I would hope that this time the government will do the right thing.

The fact is that government waste, mismanagement and scandal have robbed this province of the funds needed to adequately address social concerns. It's unacceptable that we create more bureaucracy and another level of cost, unless we can ensure that the real beneficiaries are the people whom this commission is designed to serve: those people most in need.

What's clear, Speaker, is that life has been harder under the Liberals, and there's no segment of our society that feels more vulnerable than those on social assistance. Again, what we need more than any other thing is improved direct support for those on social assistance. My lingering fear, though, is that it will come with more mismanagement, cost overruns and little real benefit for those it's designed to serve: those truly in need.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I will be supporting this particular initiative this afternoon on the part of member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, who, I think, sincerely has an interest in this and is not interested in simply castigating the government on this occasion, but is genuinely interested in looking for some independent views on the issue of compensation and money for people who are genuinely in need in our province.

We have gone through a consultation, as the minister previously said. We're looking at all the independent views we can possibly have on this.

I don't want to pretend something, and the member doesn't pretend this—I give him credit for this. I just listened to the end of his speech: If it wasn't for government waste or 10,000 other reasons, they could finance this. If we want to do the things we want to do in this province, we need the revenue to do it, and people have to be honest enough to say that. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has been a person who has been honest enough to indicate that that's what we have to do. We've had some ongoing discussions, and there's a clear consensus on the need to move on the initiative he is

talking about today. We're going to continue to engage with the various delivery partners and those who receive funding from the government as well, to ensure that people are living in a decent way in our society.

It was pretty traumatic when there was a 22% cut in money that is provided to people receiving social services in this province. One always understands, when there are challenging economic circumstances, that governments look for ways to be able to save some money. But when it's on the most vulnerable people in the province, that is something I find particularly unacceptable. People of means have the opportunity with their own means, financial or otherwise—means or connections—to be able to look after themselves. Often, some people will say, "Well, everybody in our society should be in that position." But to walk a mile in the other person's shoes, I think, is something we have to do.

One of your previous members from Scarborough, Richard Johnston, took on an initiative where he was trying to live the way a person would have to on social assistance. He did it in a public way, not for personal publicity but to draw attention to the fact that with the amount of money people had to live on, it was at the very least extremely challenging to do so.

What the member is trying to do is get some independent assessment and independent recommendations to government. Ultimately, government has to make those tough decisions, and they are. They're never easy decisions to make, but to have the kind of recommendations he is trying to elicit through this initiative will be very helpful to government and to the Legislature as a whole, and I commend him for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd just like to thank the people who spoke on this: the Minister of Community and Social Services and the members from Perth–Wellington and London West.

A little point to the member from Beaches–East York: This is a non-partisan type of bill. We all care about people struggling in poverty, and we try not to bring in finger-pointing—you did this and you did that. I'd like to explain to the public: The member said we didn't vote for that or we didn't vote for this, but in a budget process you get the whole budget and you can't cherry-pick what you want and say, "I'm going to vote for that." You might have two or three good things in that budget, and you might have 10 things that are wrong that your party can't support. So when they say that and point the finger and say, "You didn't support this," or "You didn't support that," you're darned right we didn't, because there were 15 things wrong and two things right.

I would also make a special point about the member for Parkdale–High Park. She's passionate; she's lived it; she understands it. She's pushed this in Toronto for years with her colleague from Toronto–Danforth, and I admire the member's resolve. I admire her—the person who actually lived it. It's like a general: If he really wants to know what's going on in an army, he goes to the guys in

the trenches; he doesn't talk to the captains or the majors. Cheri is just that type of person who goes to the source. Thank you so much, Cheri.

The Chair of Cabinet, the member from St. Catharines, is a seasoned veteran who has seen a lot of things go on in this House over the years. I admire him, because when he sees something that is socially responsible, or something that someone is trying to do to help people in need, he stands up. I give him credit for that, and I thank him for that.

1450

When people are not afraid to talk to their own party and go against maybe a bad decision—I admire those types of people. I might be one of them. But the bottom line is, you let your heart be your guide. We should have more of that in here, as opposed to finger-pointing and being destructive and not getting things done. We could do so much, Speaker, so much more good for the people of this province.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS ÉLÈVES AYANT DES BESOINS PARTICULIERS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Education should recognize the success of provincial and demonstration schools in supporting our most vulnerable students by reopening enrolment at Robarts School for the Deaf, Amethyst Demonstration School, Centre Jules-Léger provincial and demonstration school, Trillium Demonstration School and Sagonaska Demonstration School and ensure that no provincial or demonstration schools will close as a result of current consultations.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. Gretzky has moved private member's notice of motion number 66. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Before I begin the debate I would like to point out that we do have ASL and LSQ sign language interpreters here for the visitors who are in the chamber today—and we have many overflow rooms; we couldn't fit everybody in the chamber today so we have people in many overflow rooms here at Queen's Park—and they are also here for the people at home who couldn't be with us today for this debate.

I'd like to start the debate talking about the purpose of provincial and demonstration schools. It seems as though perhaps some of the members on the government side don't truly understand what the purpose and the value of provincial and demonstration schools is.

Provincial schools are for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or deaf-blind. Currently, it is schools for the deaf and hard of hearing that are going through a consultation process, and it certainly looks like at the end of that process—which didn't appear to be really a truthful and meaningful process—the whole purpose was to give parents the false hope that they were being listened to.

It looks like the purpose of that consultation was to close the schools, to close some of them, consolidate them into maybe one or two schools, and force families who already travel a great distance to have their students in these specialized schools travel even farther—in fact, to make it even more difficult for students who need an ASL or an LSQ environment to attend these special schools.

I'm sure everybody in the chamber here today understands the importance of provincial schools, but not everybody watching this at home may understand the importance of the schools. These are students who would not receive the services and the supports they need. They would not be immersed in an ASL or an LSQ environment in their home school in a district school board. I'm talking about schools where the majority, if not all of the students, do not struggle with hearing; they have their full hearing. The students who go to provincial schools need—it's vital that they are immersed in—an ASL or an LSQ environment in order for them to thrive.

I think it's also important to point out the purpose of demonstration schools, because there is a difference. I know in the media there was some confusion. They were reporting that it's provincial demonstration schools—and demonstration schools are provincial schools. But there are two different kinds of schools: There are provincial schools for the deaf and hard of hearing and then there are demonstration schools. Those are for students with severe learning disabilities. These are students who start off in a home school in a district school board. They go to schools in their community. They struggle. They struggle not only to learn, they struggle to have their learning disability recognized.

The current process to have a student recognized as having a learning disability—not only having a learning disability, but then to recognize what that disability is—is cumbersome, it's lengthy, it can be costly for parents, and often at the end of that process in the district school boards parents are told, “That's not what your child is struggling with. We don't recognize that.”

I'm going to use an example. I met with Decoding Dyslexia earlier this week, and I was told that parents are not allowed to use the term “dyslexic.” If they've taken their child to an independent assessment and it has been determined after a lengthy process that the learning disability is dyslexia, they then return to the school board and say, “We have an assessment. This is what the professionals are saying. This is what my child is struggling with and this is what we need supports with,” only to be told that dyslexia isn't a real thing; it doesn't exist.

That's a directive from the ministry; that's not a directive from the board. The school boards do the best that they can with the tools that they are given. They follow the guidelines and the rules sent down from the ministry. I think it's disgraceful that we have professionals who are identifying students with special needs and actually being able to put a name to it, to quantify it and say, “This is what your child is struggling with and these are the supports that can help them,” only to have school

boards—who have their hands tied—say, “We don't recognize that. That's actually not a real thing. The ministry says that doesn't exist.”

I think that's really shameful and I think that's something that the Minister of Education and the government should work towards changing. These students—all students with learning disabilities, all students who are deaf or hard of hearing—may have similar issues. Two students may be deaf or hard of hearing. Two students may have a learning disability. They may be dyslexic, but that doesn't mean they're the same. They are still individuals and they still have individual needs. We need a government that recognizes that these students are individuals and that they need to be supported in a very special and very individualized way.

With demonstration schools, as I pointed out, the students start off in a home school in a district school board in their community. If they're lucky, it's a school actually in their neighbourhood and they haven't been forced to leave their neighbourhood because of a school closure and get on a bus for an hour each way in order to attend a school. Hopefully it's a school right in their community. Once they've gone through this lengthy and very difficult process of being identified and being recognized, parents start to undertake the process of application. That's a very lengthy process, as it would be with the provincial schools. It's a very lengthy and costly process. There are a lot of assessments that take place.

Then they apply and they wait and they hope that they can get into these specialized schools. They hope that they'll be accepted into a demonstration school. I have to point out the sacrifices that these families make—the parents, the siblings and the students themselves—because, as I pointed out, these are not community schools. These are specialized schools that are in different areas of the province that these families come a great distance from to attend.

In demonstration schools, the students can travel hours away from home. They spend five days in the school and then they return home on the weekends. The same applies for provincial schools. In demonstration schools, students will do one year. Once they've finally been accepted, they'll spend a year in the school. Every single student that I talked to today said that they are hopeful they get to return for a second year. I think that speaks volumes to what goes on in our provincial and demonstration schools. These students look forward to going to school.

That's not always the case for students who are struggling with learning disabilities or for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Often they feel like they're being centred out. Students who are pulled out of classrooms for extra support, often not the support they really need, feel like they're being centred out because they're different than the other kids in their classroom. I think that—no, I know, in fact; I don't think—I know that when they move into a provincial school or they go to a demonstration school, they're amongst other students who have similar struggles, who understand who they are

and accept them for who they are, and they all support and encourage each other.

The important piece about demonstration schools is that after, hopefully, two years at a demonstration school, those students then return to their home school in their community, where they thrive. We've seen cuts to education—\$430 million. The Minister of Education will say it's not a cut. But when you reduce spending by \$430 million in education, that's a cut to education. When we see students struggling and not receiving the special education supports they need in the district school boards, to have them move on to a specialized school, learn what they need to do, what supports they need, and then return to a district school board and excel—they go on to do incredible things. They become doctors and lawyers and engineers. They go on to start their own corporations. Many of them become teachers. I think that speaks volumes to the education workers within the provincial and demonstration schools, that the students they are working with actually aspire to become the people who have helped them. I think that's a really important piece.

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When you strip them of the ability to participate in the types of environment that a provincial or a demonstration school provides for them, you're stripping them of not only their hope, you're stripping them of their opportunities and their ability to thrive. Often, you're stripping them of their dreams. They want to go and do great things. They're capable of doing it. It's not that they can't learn; they can. They can do incredible things. They need the supports in order to do that.

We've seen through the consultation process a lot of uncertainty and a lot of worry for families, and it's important for everybody to recognize that this is not a new struggle for these families. This has been going on for years. It keeps coming up again and again. They're constantly under attack of losing these specialized supports.

We've had families who went through the lengthy application process. They've spent the money in order to get the assessments they need for their students, only to be told that, "We don't want you right now. We're putting enrolment on hold while we decide whether we're going to close your school or not." I don't even know how to verbalize that, because I haven't lived it. I think you really have to live it to fully understand what that does to a family.

If you had looked out to the faces here in the gallery and up in the public gallery today during question period, we had many children in tears because they don't know what their future holds for them. They don't know if they're going to be able to attend these schools. They don't know if they're going to be there for their siblings. We've heard about siblings who have—I'm going to point out Lexi in the gallery over here who was brave enough to come forward and tell her story, how she just wants what her brother had. We've had many students who have come forward and said, "I just want the same opportunities for myself, for my brothers and sisters or

for other students"—the generations to come. When you put them through this process time and time again, and you tell them, "We're not taking you right now. We thought maybe we could take you, but now we've changed our mind. We're not going to take you because we're deciding whether or not we're going to close your school," the kids really start to lose hope. It's really not fair to them. You have to look at what the effect is on the students and the families.

The minister stood up in question period today and said, "It's not about money." I don't know what else it could be about. I don't know why on earth you would consider closing any school, frankly, but especially the specialized schools that help these children excel. Why would you close these schools if it wasn't about money? I think that was actually a disgraceful comment to make, and very untrue.

Most of these families have done this for so long—they know there was a report that came out; it was all about money and it said to close the schools. They know that's the direction it's going. I'm hoping that, after today, seeing these families and the impact on these families and hearing their stories, I really hope they were heard and really listened to.

The minister and the Premier were both school board trustees themselves. They know the struggles that district school boards are having. They know what these kids are going through. I hope they will see the light, reverse course and agree to keep these schools open for future generations—not just for the next school year, 2016-17, but for years to come.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Welcome to all the parents and students who are here today. I know you've travelled a long way to be present for this debate.

As Minister of Education, I want to make sure that we are delivering high-quality programs and services to all of our students, including our most vulnerable. Our government is committed to the success and well-being of every child and student, giving them access to the supports they need to succeed in school and in life. That's why, in February, we announced that we would be consulting with our education partners about our provincial and demonstration schools.

I want to go back and talk a little bit about what provincial and demonstration schools are. The provincial schools actually began to open shortly after Confederation. The first was Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf in Belleville, which opened in 1870, followed by Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton in 1963. Robarts School for the Deaf in London opened in 1974 and Centre Jules-Léger, or CJL for short, added programs to serve the francophone deaf in 1986. We also have a provincial school in Brantford which provides schools for the blind and the deaf-blind. It too opened shortly after Confederation, in 1872. So there has long been a concern in the province about how we provide services for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or deaf-blind.

The schools for the deaf have one thing in common. All the schools for the deaf provide programming in sign language: the three English-language affiliated schools in ASL, American sign language; and CJL in Ottawa, the francophone school, in LSQ, the equivalent of ASL for francophones. But the primary language of instruction, the language that the students use to communicate with each other and that the staff use, is sign language in these schools and always has been. That's one of their primary characteristics.

The demonstration schools are a much more recent invention. They pre-date Bill 82, which was the first act that required school boards to provide special needs. Before that, you would often find that students who had some sort of a learning disability or an intellectual disability would be just simply ignored by school boards; they really didn't have a place in school boards.

The demonstration schools, if I go back and read what the original intent was, were originally established to provide a one-year residential education program for students with severe learning disabilities—I would note, severe learning disabilities but average or above-average intelligence. The idea was that they would provide students with sufficient skills and learning strategies to be able to return to their local school board programs. Also, they were providing in-service to teachers, because at that point the school boards actually didn't have any teachers who had any training whatsoever in providing special needs. So part of their role was, and continues to be, training.

The demonstration schools were located at the same sites at the provincial schools in Belleville, Milton, London and Ottawa. What the demonstration schools have in common, other than addressing severe learning disabilities—very successfully, I might say, Mr. Speaker—is that they're residential schools, which means, as has been noted already, the kids travel to the demonstration school each week no matter where they live in the province and then return home again on Friday afternoon.

Let me give you a little bit of information about the current status of these schools. The five provincial schools in total have 425 students—that's the blind and the deaf-blind. With all of those together at the five schools, there are 425 students. The four demonstration schools currently have 153 students.

First of all, let's talk a little bit about the schools for the deaf. From 2004 to 2014, the overall enrolment in the schools for the deaf has decreased by 34%. Particularly at Robarts in London, there was a 47% decrease in enrolment; we expect that there will be less than 20 students enrolled at the Robarts schools next year in 2016-17. In the case of CJL, Centre Jules-Léger, the enrolment has actually decreased by 67% over the last 10 years, and we anticipate that there will be less than 10 students enrolled at CJL next year.

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The issue here would be—and the member opposite is also a former trustee—that if you have less than 20 students or less than 10 students in a school where you're

offering a complete kindergarten to grade 12 program, it is very, very difficult to offer a complete kindergarten to grade 12 program with those low numbers of students. Speaker, I know your wife is a teacher, and you can relate to the difficulty of doing K to 12 with that number of students. That's why we're looking at those two schools for the deaf: because we understand the difficulty of delivering the program, and we want to figure out how we effectively offer a program when we're faced with that few students in those specific locations.

There are more students at Whitney and at Drury in Belleville and in Milton, and we're not looking at those. They have healthy student populations. We're not looking at them. We understand the importance of the ASL programs to the students and to the families who are deaf or hard of hearing and who rely on ASL. We understand that. Our concern is that in these two particular schools, there's an issue around the current enrolments.

On the other hand, with the demonstration schools, if we look at the data, there are about 76,000 children in Ontario who actually are identified as learning disabled. Now, many of those are not severe learning disabled, I understand that. They're not nearly as severely struggling to learn to read as the children at the demonstration schools are, but there are literally thousands of children across Ontario who have severe learning disabilities. Our interest here is, given that there are literally thousands of students who could benefit from the methodologies that are learned at the demonstration schools, how do we do a better job with those thousands of kids who don't have access to a demonstration school program? I quite agree; these are extraordinarily successful programs.

In February and March, we did consult. I've been in London, Milton, Ottawa and Belleville and met with people because I wanted to understand what they had to say. What we heard was that, for the people who are deaf and deaf-blind, for those students and for those families, having a culture where you can actually participate in the culture with people surrounding you, all of whom use ASL or LSQ as the case may be, is extraordinarily important for you to acquire language. ASL is really the language for these students, and that culture is really, really important. So, we need to think carefully about that.

What we heard in the demonstration schools is how extraordinarily successful they are with their very targeted strategies that they teach the students on reading. What we also heard was that the same students, when they had been integrated into the neighbourhood school, had suffered, in many cases, from programs that obviously weren't terribly successful or they wouldn't have been so many years behind in learning to read, but they had also been targets of bullying. They'd had really unhappy experiences in their neighbourhood schools. We need to think about that too. We need to think about what's going on there and how do we prevent that? How do we address that?

We've got some problems here. We need to figure out a solution. We have not come to any decision about what the solution is. But what we have done is restarted the admission process while we figure out a solution, so that

the students can continue on at the four demonstration schools, as the case may be, or at the Robarts or CJL, for 2016-17.

I want to assure people that, number one, we have not made any other decisions about the futures of the schools; number two, my criteria has nothing to do with money. My criteria is, how do we provide programming that is excellent for all the students—either sign language users or those with severe learning disabilities, as the case may be—and how do we do that effectively for all of the students in the province that have the same need?

My apologies to my colleagues for taking up so much time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Let me briefly recap what the minister just said. She acknowledges that the demonstration and provincial schools are working and they're doing a magnificent job, yet she decided to stop accepting applications for these schools that were working so well. She told teachers, staff and principals to prepare to go back to their home boards. And she has no plan, and this government has no plan, as to where they're going. That's what I heard in the 12 minutes from the education minister. It's appalling.

The members of the official opposition were extremely worried when some deals were being made inside the Minister of Education's offices, deals that were exposed later on the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, when they claimed that there was going to be net zero and the cuts were going to come from inside the budget of the Ministry of Education. We worried that it might be special education that was cut. Now we know what their plan was: It was to cut demonstration and provincial schools, which is completely unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to welcome all of the parents, staff, grads, current students and future students who are here with us today at the Legislature. This morning, Mr. Speaker, we got a rare example of what real courage looks like, and it almost brought me to tears. As a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago, it did bring me to tears. We don't often get to watch a 10-year-old girl stare down the Minister of Education, but we got that opportunity today. She has a right to an education just like every other kid in this province, and she said so. She has a right to a future just like every other kid in the province. She's the one who said that today to the Minister of Education. This little girl is 10 years old and already she's a hero.

It's a privilege every day to come to work in this place. It's a privilege every day to have the people of your community entrust you with their issues and voice them here in the Legislature. Every once in a while, you have one of those moments that reminds you of why you wanted to be here in the first place. Someone or something comes to your attention that reminds you that what goes on in this place has the potential to give someone a brighter future or, what we're seeing from the government, to take that future away.

Speaker, today is our opportunity to give my little friend Lexi a bright future. Today is our opportunity to tell the government that these are more than just schools. These are places that change the lives of students who have nowhere else to turn. It's nothing short of malpractice on our part if we don't speak up for these students and tell the government that these kids shouldn't have to exist year to year wondering whether or not the school is going to exist or whether the funding is going to come their way.

It was amazing to watch the government respond this morning during question period, Mr. Speaker. First, we had the Premier trying to take credit for a one-year reprieve for schools that never should have been on the chopping block in the first place. Then we had the Minister of Education tell us that the consultations had only recently concluded but that they would be ongoing as the minister met with more people.

My colleague the member from Windsor West, whose motion we're now debating, then revealed to the House that the minister was originally supposed to be discussing staff impacts this spring after the decision was made.

1520

We always stated that the endgame here was to close these schools and the consultations were just for show, and I believe that further consultations are just another show. The minister just decided to blow some more taxpayer money by giving the consultants a second booking in this process. There was no original intent by the government to keep these schools open. They decided to do it yesterday to try to short-circuit the demonstrations that were planned here at the Legislature.

That's why, for the first time in this entire process, the government talked about new legislation around students with learning disabilities in question period today. Speaker, kids like Lexi deserve more than solutions made up on the fly, around a kitchen table or on the back of a napkin. We've seen far too many policies developed that way in the last couple of days. The minister and the government know this.

Kids with learning disabilities, educated at demonstration schools, have gone on to remarkable careers. They're physicists, doctors, lawyers; they've gone to MIT, Cornell, Queen's, McGill; they've had great success. These schools change lives. They save lives and provide hope. If we are in no other business in this place, let it be that one. Let us be in the business of giving kids hope, who are often looking for it wherever they can find it.

I've had the opportunity to visit Sagonaska a couple of different times and meet the students there. I want to read a couple of the messages that were sent to me by the kids. They wrote on the back of these cards what Sagonaska school means to them.

The first one is from Kayla Steven. She's 14. "Sagonaska has given me confidence in myself and has made me a better reader. I've made friends for life thanks to Sagonaska."

Jackson: "Sagonaska

"—helped me read better

- “—helped me learn to swim better
- “—helped me learn to self-advocate
- “—learned to play the guitar
- “—learned to use my tech better
- “—helped me improve my social skills.”

Janine, who is 14: “Sagonaska is really important to me. It’s basically my home. Sagonaska helped me in many ways. I started at a grade 1 reading level and now I am at a grade 7 reading level.”

These are real kids in our communities, Mr. Speaker. They wanted me to pass on their messages here today.

I’d just like to thank those again who are here to advocate for the school, and I really want to say that this one is for Lexi. Thank you all for being here.

Government: Do the right thing.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think this is probably one of the most inspiring motions I have had the pleasure to contribute to in debate in this House, in my short memory here.

The potential of this motion, Speaker—it talks about this minister wanting to close schools. We’re saying that we want to make sure we get a commitment from this minister to keep provincial schools and demonstration schools across this province open.

I want to express my pride in the efforts of my colleague from Windsor West, who has done a fantastic job opposing this unfair and highly damaging course of action. New Democrats know that the government may need to make some tough decisions because they have to make up for billions of misspent tax dollars. But the government can’t balance the books on the backs of vulnerable kids with highly specialized needs.

Robarts School for the Deaf and the Amethyst Demonstration School in London have been providing students with severe learning disabilities with quality, highly specialized educational services for decades. Provincial and demonstration schools are vital to exceptional-needs students in Ontario. These kids often fall through the cracks in the system. It’s this program that catches them and provides them with the equal opportunity to thrive like their peers in district schools. The unique educational experiences offered at these schools have a lasting impact. Perhaps the government is simply not aware of the true value of the Amethyst and Robarts schools and all the provincial demonstration schools across this province. That’s what we are here to point out today. We’re here to tell the minister what the value of these schools are and what it means to keep them open.

As I mentioned before, Speaker, students thrive and succeed in programs that adapt to their specific needs in small classes with highly specialized curricula, and these kids make improvements in leaps and bounds in an incredibly short period of time.

I have to stress the critical, fundamental importance of the environment at Robarts and Amethyst, including the residential setting, to these students’ success. That cannot be reduplicated in home schools. The residential segment of the educational environment is a complement to the

success of these students. Robarts and Amethyst take a holistic, immersive approach to individualized educational programs, which include the need for residence at the school. The residential component—I can’t stress enough—builds leadership, advocacy, assertiveness and life skills for these students.

While we are pleased this week to hear that these families’ pleas for the schools’ continued existence have triggered the reopening of enrolment for the upcoming school year, that is just a small part of what we’re asking in this motion. We’re asking for the government and this minister to commit to keeping these schools open.

If you want to talk about evidence-based research, Speaker, here it is in the gallery. We have students who are here; we have alumni; we have parents, grandparents and friends, all here supporting this evidence-based educational program offered at these provincial schools.

I just want to finish off by saying that we need to have these schools stay open. I support this motion. I hope the minister here today is going to stand up and do the right thing and support this motion not to close provincial and demonstration schools.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks, Speaker. It’s great to see you in the chair this afternoon.

I want to begin by thanking the parents from across the province, including those from Leeds–Grenville, who made the trip to Queen’s Park today. In particular, I want to recognize the tremendous work of a constituent of mine, Lesley Lehman. She has been a passionate, tireless advocate and leader in rallying support for these schools.

Let’s be clear: Without the work of Lesley and the other parents who are here today, the Minister of Education wouldn’t have backed down yesterday. You should all take some pride in that fact, but I think we all know—everyone in this chamber and everyone in the galleries today—that our work is not finished. You didn’t go through hell these past several months for a one-year reprieve, only to have to do it again next year.

I’ve heard from so many parents who have already shared their deeply personal stories about schools like Sagonaska, as my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings talked about earlier, and what that school has meant to their families. We’ve learned over the past month or so the amazing difference that these programs, and the teachers and staff who deliver them, have made.

Personally, Speaker, I can’t comprehend any government—any government—that would want to shut those down. But make no mistake, that was the plan. That was the government’s plan. That’s why I think the vote today will be very instructional. We’re going to find out soon if yesterday’s announcement was in fact to deflect from today’s rally. If this government is truly committed to these remarkable programs and these incredible students, then some members across will join us in supporting the motion from the member for Windsor West.

I will be watching closely. I know the folks in the galleries will be watching closely. We want to support

you today, and we want to support the member for Windsor West.

1530

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is an honour for me to rise today, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to speak to this motion that was brought forward by the member from Windsor West.

It was important for me to speak to this motion for two reasons. First, the motion refers to six schools in the province of Ontario. Two of those schools are located in my community of London: Robarts School for the Deaf and Amethyst Demonstration School.

Second, like the member for Windsor West, I served as a school board trustee. I served for 13 years on the Thames Valley District School Board. I recognize the importance of programs that address the unique educational needs of students.

I want to thank all the parents who have advocated so hard on behalf of the students across the province who are going to be affected by the potential closure of these schools, because it is their efforts that have led to this temporary reprieve. Hopefully, we will get the government to reverse the decision completely.

However, what those parents have done by organizing these kinds of protests, by organizing rallies, is that they have made their voices heard. When I attended the rally in London on March 31, I talked to students. I talked to students who had been failed by our mainstream educational system but who had gone on to incredible success at Amethyst school. By closing that school and other demonstration schools in the province, we are denying these students the opportunity to achieve their full potential—the potential that we know that they are capable of, because we've seen the success that they have gone on to achieve.

When I went to that rally, I also talked to teachers. I was chair of the special education committee in my school board. I know that we benefited from teachers who taught at the demonstration schools and applied new strategies and learned new things that they were then able to take back into mainstream classrooms. So there was a real synergy, a real exchange of best practice, that benefits all students in the province but particularly the students who are at the demonstration schools.

I also talked to counsellors, students and parents who told me about the importance of these residential schools in dealing with the whole child, and the kinds of relationships that were formed, the bonds that were created—that last a lifetime, quite frankly—between the staff who work at the residential schools and the students who attend there.

I hear the minister talk about the fact that this is not about money. Well, quite frankly, that feeds into the cynicism that Ontarians feel about politics and politicians, when they hear things like that. We know that the Drummond report identified the closure of these schools as a way to meet the province's fiscal targets. We know that the Drummond commission was established

specifically to find cost savings, and this was one of the strategies.

I really commend the member for Windsor West. I hope that everybody in this House will support this motion today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais commencer par remercier tous ceux qui sont venus aujourd'hui apporter leur voix dans ce débat. Ça me fait toujours plaisir quand les gens prennent l'opportunité de venir ici à Queen's Park et de nous dire ce que ça va vouloir dire dans leur vie à eux.

Laissez-moi vous parler un petit peu du Centre Jules-Léger. C'est la seule école provinciale à accueillir des élèves provenant des 12 conseils scolaires de langue française. Ils font ça depuis 35 ans. Le Centre Jules-Léger, c'est deux écoles, une école primaire et secondaire, c'est des résidences, c'est des services consultatifs—ils ont plus de 400 enfants francophones à travers tous les conseils scolaires—c'est aussi un module, une classe pour les élèves sourds et aveugles.

À Jules-Léger, on retrouve les écoles d'application pour les élèves ayant des troubles sévères d'apprentissage, l'école provinciale pour les élèves sourds et malentendants, le programme préscolaire et préparatoire en surdité, les services consultatifs pour les 12 conseils, le programme résidentiel pour les élèves, la langue des signes québécoise, le plan d'enseignement individualisé, les équipes multidisciplinaires, etc.

On parle d'enfants qui ont des capacités intellectuelles suffisantes pour apprendre mais qui ont de la difficulté à apprendre. Ils ont un trouble d'apprentissage. Lorsqu'ils se rendent à l'école Jules-Léger, finalement ils sont capables d'apprendre. On traite, chez l'enfant, la difficulté d'apprentissage. Il y a des techniques spécialisées en psychosociolinguistique et en neurolinguistique. L'enfant apprend à apprendre, et ça change leur vie au complet.

I'd like to thank Mrs. Sharon Gorman, who came to see me about this. She gave me the example of the Amyotte family from my riding. Both parents and both kids have a severe learning disability, but because the daughter was able to go to one of the provincial schools, she's driving. She is a truck driver for one of the big construction companies in Sudbury. She has a good job and a pension plan. She can sustain her family. She has learned to read enough so that she can have a driver's licence and pass all of the courses so that she can go on to all of the mine sites. There are so, so many success stories like this, but all of this is in trouble.

Pourquoi? Parce qu'on a un gouvernement qui a décidé qu'on ne pouvait plus accepter d'étudiants dans ces écoles-là et un gouvernement qui a décidé qu'il ferait une consultation—mais ce n'est pas une consultation qu'il faisait. Ce qu'il faisait vraiment, c'était de se trouver des excuses pour fermer les écoles, mettre les gens à pied et sauver de l'argent.

Je ne peux pas croire qu'en 2016, on aurait un gouvernement qui n'aurait tellement pas de cœur qu'il serait capable de faire quelque chose comme ça. Parce

que tous ces gens-là sont venus à Queen's Park pour dire à leur gouvernement, « Ne faites pas ça », le gouvernement a reculé d'un pas. Ils ont dit qu'ils ne le feront pas pour cette année. Mais ce n'est pas assez. Il faut s'assurer que ces écoles, comme le Centre Jules-Léger, seront là pour l'année prochaine et pour toutes les années à venir.

J'espère que les voix de tous les gens qui sont ici ont été entendues. Merci d'être venus.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm going to commend the member for Windsor West for bringing this forward, and my colleague from Prince Edward-Hastings for his very passionate remarks moments ago.

I'm going to make four points, if I can, as somebody who has just been around a while, seen a lot of things come and go and had a few experiences in my own life in this area. I just think that the more choice we can give people, particularly parents, the better off we are. I know that there are complexities around education—there's a long history—but surely we should be putting more choices on the table instead of taking them away.

Secondly, I just think that when it comes to issues, particularly education and health care, parents make well-informed decisions about what's in their kids' best interests. I trust parents far more than bureaucrats or government officials to make the call for where their kid goes to school. If you heard the Minister of Education, between the lines what she's saying is that these schools aren't good for kids and that they should be brought into these other schools and we should close them down and build new. When it comes to that judgment call, I'm going to trust the parents to make the right call for their kids, not the government.

The buildings we have, like Sick Kids and demonstration schools and provincial schools—we're glad we have them, but you never want to use them. So when parents make that choice, they're doing so because they've invested the time and they know their kid is going to have the best chance of succeeding if they get those special services. The culture that develops—staff isn't staff; staff is a family—and the support of the other kids.

My daughter went to Holland Bloorview. Thank God she did. If they were closing that school down, I would fight like hell—like these parents are doing here today—to make sure it stayed open for the next generation of kids so that they can succeed. Sometimes immersion won't work. Sometimes parents will rightly say, “They're not ready yet.” Sometimes parents will rightly say, “I don't trust you because when I look at the other schools, they're cutting EAs today”—including the one in my daughter's class. It's gone. It makes it harder, Speaker. Good for the parents who are fighting, and good for my colleagues in this caucus and that one. Let's see what these guys do. I believe in preserving that choice for parents to help their kids get an even brighter future.

1540

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to recognize the member from Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you, Speaker. I only have 19 seconds. I thank the member from Windsor West for bringing this motion forward and I can tell you that on this side of the House it's not about money. It's not about dollars. It's about providing the best outcome for our children.

I'll tell you what it shouldn't be about, Speaker. It should not be about cheap partisan politics. It should not be about exploitation of the parents. It should be about our students.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return back to the member from Windsor West for the wrap-up.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I think it's really unfortunate that the member from Durham decided to take this discussion in that direction. I would just like to—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I already reminded some of you: no crosstalking, okay?

I'm going to return to the member from Windsor West.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: In the two minutes I have left, or now a minute and a half, I just want to point out that I know as a trustee, the member from Durham who was a trustee knows, the Minister of Education knows and the Premier knows—they were all trustees—that when it comes to the education sector, everything is based on funding that comes from the government. Every decision is based on funding that comes from the government.

The minister talks about declining enrolment at these schools. These schools have an average capacity of 120 to 150 kids who can live in residence at these schools. The government has capped enrolment at 40 students. They have caused this problem, not the families, not the children and not the community members that support this. The government has caused the problem by capping enrolment. They've created the case to close these schools. When they capped enrolment, it decreased the funding that flows to these schools directly for programming—the very argument that the minister is making.

The minister knows better as a former trustee. When she cites declining enrolment and the funding isn't there for programming, she knows better. They created this problem. It's their time to fix it, to make it right. Stand up to all the families here today—those in this room, those in the overflow rooms and the families at home—and tell them that you support them, that you understand the importance of the schools, that you understand the importance of their children's future and that you are going to do the right thing. Don't stand up here and string them along any longer.

CAPPING ONTARIO'S DEBT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAFONNEMENT
DE LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. McNaughton moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 168, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act / *Projet de loi 168, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'administration financière.*

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm really happy today to debate my private member's bill, the Capping Ontario's Debt Act. At the outset, I want to say to the MPPs that this is nothing new in North America or across the world. Kenya, Poland, Denmark, Alberta, all three Canadian territories and the United States have a debt cap bill in their jurisdictions.

It's no secret that I'm deeply concerned with our growing debt in this province. Ontario is the most indebted province or state in the world, so it's obvious this is a real issue. There are many reasons why I think we need to take our skyrocketing debt seriously and introduce a debt cap as an additional measure of accountability.

In the limited time I have today, I will do my best to explain why this new measure I'm introducing is so important. Fundamentally, this bill is about protecting future generations while holding politicians of all political stripes accountable for the dollars that they spend. The technical details of what this bill would do if enacted is to provide that the crown is not authorized to raise money by way of loan or to receive money through the issue and sale of securities if the effect of doing so would cause Ontario's net debt to exceed 45% of its GDP. Our debt would be capped at 45% of GDP.

The budget passed by the Liberal government will push our debt to over \$300 billion for the first time in our history. In just nine years, this government has driven Ontario's debt-to-GDP ratio from 27% to about 40%, a whopping 48% increase. With a high burden of debt, we are less able to respond to financial crises, leaving the families and businesses of this province vulnerable.

Right now, interest rates are extremely low, but they're not always going to be this low. Our debt represents a huge liability if those rates go up or if our credit rating is downgraded even further. Even now, our debt servicing costs divert funds away from other programs.

I brought forward this bill because I believe the public deserves greater accountability. The people of this province understand we're in a poor financial situation, but they don't see a real plan from this government on how to deal with it. They're seeing irresponsible spending on scandals and incompetence, like SAMS; the gas plants; \$5 billion in corporate welfare every year; paying to get rid of excess electricity—too many blunders to name here. Then they're seeing cuts to services they depend on, like health care and education, and there's no end in sight.

The Liberal government has tried to frame the conversation around our growing debt to make it as flattering as possible for themselves. For seven years in a row, they've created artificially high projections for the deficit, and lo and behold, each year they beat the target

they created. In fact, I'm sure we will be hearing about that a few times this afternoon.

They say they are on track to balance the budget, but the Auditor General has been clear that "net debt and total debt are both expected to continue growing in absolute terms even after the province starts to run annual budget surpluses. This important fact should not go unnoticed by members of the Legislature and the public."

The government is also relying, in their budget, on extraordinarily optimistic revenue numbers. In that document, they project that revenues will grow at a rate of 4.6% between now and 2019, and at a rate of 5% for the next three years. This includes 7% revenue growth over the next year alone. Meanwhile, the Financial Accountability Officer is also optimistic but still projects only 3.3% revenue growth over three years. So the government says 4.6% and the FAO says 3.3%, while the real revenue growth since 2008 has only averaged 2.6%. The scary thing is that it's unlikely that they will even achieve the numbers that they've set out.

While the government may be able to use such tactics to successfully change the conversation of the day, they won't change the reality of the balance sheet. Our debt is continuing to grow. Thirty years ago, the provincial debt was a manageable \$31.5 billion. Nine years ago, it had grown to \$153 billion. Today, it has doubled to our current \$308 billion.

The people of Ontario are already feeling the consequences of this reckless fiscal management. Even with historically low rates, Ontario spends almost \$1 billion every month just to service the debt. Just as the Auditor General warned, this cost is crowding out critical programs and services.

This week, and today, we have seen many distraught parents in this House and rallying outside, justifiably upset to be threatened with the loss of vital services for their children. As a father myself, I find this unimaginable. Demonstration schools and autism services for children over five years old are on the chopping block because of this government's poor financial management. We can't allow our children and the vulnerable to pay endlessly for the waste and scandal we've witnessed under this Liberal government.

We have a duty to legislate with the good of our children and our children's children in mind. A debt cap certainly won't solve this issue, but it would serve as a safeguard to make the government more accountable. If we reach a level of debt on the threshold of 45% of GDP, the government would have to return to this House and answer to the people of this province for their decisions.

1550

This government has done their best to keep the public from having a real conversation about government spending and priorities. We saw that clearly with the introduction of the budget before the report on pre-budget consultations had ever been written. It's also clear from the lack of disclosure in how this government is spending taxpayers' money.

Despite the barriers this government has put up against meaningful engagement, the people of this province are

eager to have their voices heard. In support of this bill, I've been touring around the province and engaging online with people from across Ontario to discuss why and how we need to tackle the debt. From Ottawa to Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and the GTA, and of course a few visits to Sarnia-Lambton, people were eager to share their thoughts on how we can get Ontario back in the black. Rather than sitting down at my kitchen table on a Saturday evening to draft up a plan, I went out to meet with economists, businesses owners, parents, community activists, young professionals, students and think tanks. On this Back in the Black tour, we discussed a broad range of ideas to make life more affordable in Ontario, get rid of barriers to productivity, and get our province growing again.

I heard loud and clear that the Drive Clean program and the death tax are seen as nothing more than a shakedown. People want these programs gone. With the costs of administering and enforcing these bad initiatives, the province would be further ahead by doing away with them.

I spoke with real estate agents and current and aspiring homeowners. They brought forward suggestions to make it easier to buy and sell a home in this province, such as capping property tax at inflation and eliminating the land transfer tax.

Taxes were something I heard about over and over again anywhere in the province. There is a feeling that our tax code is outdated and overly complex. One idea that I heard was to immediately form a committee charged with bringing forward recommendations and a sensible plan to begin modernizing, simplifying and flattening Ontario's tax code. I also heard that we should be looking at shifting the tax burden from income to consumption.

I also heard time and time again about the ORPP. Both businesses owners and employees are deeply concerned that the ORPP is going to impact them personally and about the money it's going to pull out of the economy overall.

As I mentioned earlier, corporate welfare is another issue that really has people upset. They want their government creating the conditions for businesses to succeed by focusing on the basics—affordable energy, investing in infrastructure and balancing Ontario's budget—not handing out money in secret without qualification criteria or tracking of results. We have over \$300 billion of debt. Handing out \$5 billion annually, mostly to private, profitable corporations, is disgraceful when services for autistic children are being crowded out by the budget crunch this government has created themselves.

Speaker, I won't get into all the issues discussed on this tour because I simply don't have enough time. But I want to encourage the party across the aisle, the government, in the strongest terms possible to revisit their approach of top-down governance and listen to the people of Ontario. People want a strong, stable economy that represents their priorities. Not only are they being left out of the conversation by the Liberals; they are having their

futures compromised by a government that won't take responsibility for its poor financial decisions. A debt cap would help protect future generations while holding politicians accountable for the dollars that they spend.

While the majority of feedback I've heard on this bill so far has been extremely positive, there is one critique that has come up, and that is, if we're going to have a debt cap, it should be lower than 45% of GDP. I have to say I absolutely agree. I would love to cap the debt at 40% or 42% of GDP. Unfortunately, with the Liberal track record on racking up debt and the nature of a majority government, it seemed even a debt cap as high as 45% would be unlikely to get enough support to pass. Reaching a level of debt equivalent to 45% of GDP warrants a thoughtful public discussion and marks a point at which serious measures of accountability for policy-makers should be in place. This cap is the least we should do, and it absolutely should be done.

To be honest, I'm not expecting much from the government on this bill. Our provincial debt sits at over \$300 billion, and it's obvious that they haven't any ideas on how to fix it besides burning the furniture to heat the house. I've heard loud and clear, and I'm sure all the members have as well, whether it be sky-high hydro bills, lack of a good job and sufficient income to make ends meet, or the ever-increasing cost of living for things like food and transportation, that for many in this province, times are very tough. Thanks to our \$308-billion provincial debt, it's going to get tougher and tougher as we go along.

We can't keep going down this road of endless borrowing. If the government is serious about getting a handle on the debt, they should welcome this measure and support my private member's bill, Bill 168.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House to address this private member's bill. I have to say, Speaker, that I don't have much, beyond this bill that's in my hand, to go with. I appreciate the commentary from the member defending his bill.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: There's a lot, actually, that we have to untangle here, notwithstanding the helpful comments from the minister from St. Catharines over there.

First of all, I don't think anyone can defend the Liberal financial record. I'm certainly not going to try for a moment. The only thing I would agree with, with regard to the member who spoke before me, was that right now, we're in a situation of relatively low interest rates, and if rates spring up, then, yes, we are going to have substantial problems.

But I also have to say I listened to some of the recommendations that were made, and they remind me—because I had the opportunity, maybe the misfortune, to study Canadian history at York University, and I remember the ideas of R.B. Bennett. Beyond Canadian history, I remember the ideas of Herbert Hoover. The idea that you could have flat taxes, that you would shift

the burden from those who had higher incomes to those who had lower incomes, has never made sense in terms of the economics of an advanced society. The idea that you would end a land transfer tax, that you would want to move away from income taxes to consumption taxes, essentially is an effort to wipe out a whole century of work to try and finance the operation of an advanced industrial society that we've developed through some very painful processes.

Income tax came into Canada during the First World War because the price of fighting for freedom and for the survival of this country in the face of aggression—something that was repeated in World War II—the price of that fight was ensuring there was enough income to allow the society to mobilize its resources to defend itself and to defend those values that it believed in. Income tax was needed because those who are wealthy are in a position to contribute more. Those who have very little, can't.

Frankly, Speaker, in a society where wealthy people become wealthy because of an infrastructure that exists—I'll tell you, you're not very wealthy in a society that has no roads. You're not wealthy in a society that doesn't have universities, doesn't have bridges, doesn't have communications—all of those things supported, to a greater or lesser extent, by the society as a whole. Wealthy people may have more in a society than others, but they benefit profoundly from the infrastructure that all of us pay for. And to the extent that they've benefited far more generously than the bulk of the population, they should be putting more into the kitty.

If we're talking about debt relief, debt problems, dealing with Ontario's ongoing deficit, we should look at the distribution of income in this country. Some 20% of the population has half the income; 80% of the population has the other half. Who can afford to pay the taxes that need to be paid to ensure we have roads, hospitals, schools, bridges etc.?

Some 70% of the assets in this society reside with the top 20%, and 30% are with the bottom 80%. Again, who has the assets, and who can afford to actually pay the money that's needed to run this society?

When you come to this House and you rail about the debt, and yet you have a party that has styled itself as the tax fighter; when you decide to cut your revenue—the Liberals have done this. In the past, they have cut corporate income tax rates, and that, Speaker, as you are well aware, has led to dead money, money sitting in the vaults of corporations, not used for productive investment, not used to employ people; rather, it's simply to make sure that the bottom lines are as fat as possible. That's not a responsible approach, and yet, that's actually the framework that wraps around this bill.

1600

I don't defend the Liberals. I think they're not good governors. I think there is no question that the hits we've seen for autistic children, the hits we've seen against the provincial schools—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. I already reminded the government side. This is the third time. I know that some colourful language is used by the member from Toronto–Danforth; I just want to remind the government side that this is the third time. I'm going to start warning individual members.

I'm going to return to the member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, if you propose a series of policies that make it impossible for you to actually raise the revenue to run your society in a way that makes it economically sustainable, prosperous, just and peaceful, and you say you're going to limit debt, then you've proposed an economic Rube Goldberg machine that will not work. It's a construct that doesn't do justice to the people of this province and really has no intellectual coherence whatsoever.

If we want a strong, stable economy, I think it makes sense to raise corporate taxes so that we have the money to pay for the things we need. We need to preserve progressive taxation so that those who have the most pay the most and those who have the least pay the least, and you have a distribution of burden according to people's ability to carry it. When you say you're going to put a cap on debt without actually addressing the revenue side of the problem, that does not work, and frankly, it undermines the society.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It is indeed a pleasure to follow my colleague from Toronto–Danforth.

Let's see if I can encapsulate the neo-conservative vision for Ontario that the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex has outlined with this Tea Party, anti-growth, retrograde idea that does not deserve the support of this or any other Legislature.

The member believes that Ontario's best days happened decades ago. Like his former federal cousins, the member's bill says to Ontarians, "This is who you are. This is all you'll ever be. This is the size of your economy. These are your economic prospects." If you believe the often-debunked premise of the member's bill, Ontario will never grow beyond those limits. Our people will never become smarter or more productive, no new industries will ever change our province or enhance our prosperity, and therefore we must never, ever borrow past his back-of-the-envelope, arbitrary debt limit. If that makes the premise of the member's bill sound foolish, it is because the premise of the member's bill truly is foolish.

Similar arbitrary, unnecessary and downright stupid laws in the United States, from which this bill has been lifted in cut-and-paste fashion, have seen both the US House of Representatives and the Senate shut down for weeks at a stretch while bitterly partisan debates raged over whether or not the world's largest economy will agree to pay its own bills.

This bill is the product of an austerity strategy that has been a failure everywhere it has been tried, every time it

has been tried. Austerity leaves every economy that dances with this cobra deeper in debt and further behind economically. Austerity is, however, what the Ontario Tea Party Conservatives have been selling for more than 20 years. It was a flop when they were in government, leaving the province with a \$5.6-billion structural debt. It was a flop for the federal Conservative government, which squandered Canada's biggest-ever budget surplus and plunged it into a debt from which they never recovered.

The premise of the member's bill is an ongoing flop in the United States, which took fully three years longer than Ontario to emerge from the 2008-09 recession. And it is a continuing flop in Europe, where even now the European Union teeters on the brink of recession.

You cannot implement wholesale budget cuts across interlinked economies unless the private sector is growing and generating taxation revenue. If everybody is cutting, then who is left to save or spend? Yet this bill allows for no alternative but budget cuts, program cuts and pushing homeowners and businesses into bankruptcy.

Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio is lower than most Canadian households'. Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio is currently about 38% and headed down, well below the member's proposed ceiling of 42%. Canada's household debt-to-income ratio is at its highest-ever level, at about 160%.

Between 1995 and 2003, Ontarians learned never, ever to trust Conservatives with money. Previous Conservative governments in the 1960s and 1970s have, however, built this province by borrowing to invest in growth.

The number of budget surpluses run by the Robarts and Davis administrations combined: zero.

The number of budget surpluses run by Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals: three in their first six years, before the recession started, and a balanced budget is forecast in the next fiscal year.

Do we want our Legislature locked in fruitless partisan debates to shut down the public service and essential services every few years? American voters and their state representatives know how truly stupid that is.

The final nail in this bill's coffin should be from the people who are actually qualified to pass judgment on Ontario's debt, which—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Wellington-Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The member for Mississauga-Streetsville is using very, very unparliamentary language, in my opinion. He's using words that are very insulting to the opposition. I would ask you to ask him to withdraw some of those unparliamentary remarks, if you agree.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to remind the member from Mississauga-Streetsville to tone down the colourful language, because some of the choice words you used are quite inflammatory. I just want to remind the member.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Speaker. We will always be hard on the idea but always gentle with the people.

The final nail in the bill's coffin should be from the people who are actually qualified to pass judgment on Ontario's debt, which lifted this province out of the recession without the wholesale layoffs seen in the USA and Europe.

Moody's bond rating service said, "Ontario's 2016 Budget Stays on Track to Balanced Budgets."

The Dominion Bond Rating Service said that the 2016 budget's "economic momentum keeps" the "fiscal plan on track."

Institutionalized budget debate gridlock? No, thank you. This bill richly deserves to be defeated.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker, and congratulations again on your recent appointment.

We want to get this debate back on track after that six or seven or so minutes. You know what, Speaker? It was just last week that I stood before this House to discuss the looming black cloud hanging over this province: Ontario's crippling debt. Truth be told, I find it rather unfortunate that in fact I have to stand here yet again, weekly, simply because the Liberal government keeps making the same fiscal mistakes over and over and over again.

The reality is this, Speaker: We are in severe debt—\$308 billion in debt. So as unfortunate as it is that I have to stand here and discuss this issue again, this discussion is worth having. Tangible solutions to ensure things do not get worse are absolutely necessary.

Although 308 billion is a large number—it's almost too large to wrap your head around—my colleague's bill could not be any simpler. Let me break down its numbers for you: It's roughly four sentences long. It asks for one amendment. It gets straight to the point, and so will I.

What we are asking for today is that the government of the day, whoever it is, not be allowed to take out a loan if it would then cause Ontario's debt to exceed 45% of its GDP. To get even more to the point, we're asking for a debt cap, a cap on our debt. That is it. That is all. Period.

Today, I am proud to stand with my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and speak in favour of his bill, which demands a credible plan to balance the books and pay down the debt. It puts the Premier and her government on a firm credit limit on behalf of everyone we represent, and everyone they represent: the Ontario taxpayer.

1610

The fact is that this year, according to the Wynne government's own projections, interest on debt payments will cost Ontario taxpayers a billion dollars every single month—a billion dollars. This government's fiscal mismanagement means more spending to pay down more debt interest. It means that nine cents out of every tax

dollar collected in revenue by the provincial government is being spent on interest payments.

On that note, let's talk about those interest rates and why my colleague's bill is so timely. An important fact to consider is that at this moment, interest rates are at a historically low level. A return to more normal levels would jeopardize promises for balanced budgets. It would also increase the money this province spends on debt interest payments.

Speaker, the Fraser Institute conducted a projected analysis of this province's debt interest payments based on two scenarios. In both scenarios, interest rates we currently receive—which, again, are historically low—return to more normal levels.

The interest rate shocks described by scenario one, where rates rise from a baseline of 2.7% to 3.5% next year and up to 4.5% by 2019-20, would increase Ontario's projected deficit by \$264 million next year and would completely derail the Premier's campaign promise of balancing the budget by the 2018 election.

In the second scenario, where rates rise to 5% by 2020, Ontario's deficit would increase by \$616 million in the 2016-17 year, and the campaign promise of a balanced budget by 2018 would not only not be met—a broken promise—but would be replaced by an increased deficit of nearly \$1 billion.

In just four short years, Ontario's interest costs would rise by half a billion dollars in scenario one, and to almost \$1.2 billion in scenario two. Speaker, these scenarios are not unrealistic. Many economists are warning of an increase in overall interest rates in the near future. If we think that our current state of being the most indebted subnational borrower in the world is bad, we may only be seeing the tip of the iceberg. The reality is frightening. It's frightening to me as a member of this House, it's frightening to the people I represent and it's frightening to me as a father because it will be our children and our grandchildren who are paying for this government's fiscal mismanagement.

Speaker, my colleague's ask is simple. Everyone has a budget they have to live on. Everyone has to live within their means. We are simply asking this government to do the same. The situation is something like a teenager who has borrowed their parents' credit card without permission and gone overboard with spending. Consequently, that teenager needs to be reined in. They need to reflect on the poor choices they've made—emphasis on “poor,” because that's what this province is right now.

Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's energy and efforts to bring this forward, and I thank you for your time.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm happy to be able to lend my voice to this debate this afternoon on An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act, basically capping the province's debt.

First of all, I would like to thank the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex for bringing this bill forward. I believe that we would share many of the reasons he

brought this forward, because the current government's lack of fiscal management concerns us all. It concerns us all greatly.

They will say, “Well, what?” I would say “Well, a billion dollars on the gas plants didn't help anyone in this province—no one. Billions of dollars on P3 projects don't really help anyone.” It costs a lot of money; it costs taxpayers money. This government is facing huge financial pressures because it lacks financial management. People are now starting to see it with the other issues we face today. They're cutting places where they shouldn't cut because they've got huge financial problems. I believe that I would share with the member that that's one of the reasons he is bringing this bill forward.

I don't support capping the debt at an arbitrary number for the simple reason that—and I don't hear too many people talk about this, and I am certainly no world financier, but I have a bit of a business background, and there is good debt and there is bad debt.

I always go back to farming, but if you spend money on something that's actually going to create wealth, or in a provincial background, something that's going to make the province better, and if you have to build up a long-term debt or mortgage to do that, it's like—

Hon. Jeff Leal: You buy a quota.

Mr. John Vanthof: A quota is a bit different, but it's like buying land.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: We're there, and that's something where you can build that debt up; then you can pay it off eventually and borrow more. It's like a business.

Where you get into trouble and where this province has big problems: Bad debt is when you need to buy a pickup truck, and a pickup truck is \$20,000, which is, let's say, \$500 a month. You decide that you could lease a Cadillac pickup truck for \$400 a month, but at the end of five years, you don't own anything. That's where they have problems, like with P3s.

That's why capping debt sometimes will create more problems: because in order to avoid that cap, governments can become very creative simply to avoid the cap, like they are now. They're promising to balance the budget and eliminate the deficit, and the government members won't agree when I say this, but one of the ways they're doing that is by selling Hydro One. That's one of the reasons why they're selling Hydro One: so they can meet their deficit targets.

A previous reiteration of the Progressive Conservative government, I do believe, sold or leased something called the 407 to balance their deficit. Right? That was them. Again, this budget—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. I've already reminded members that I do not want crosstalk. I've already reminded the government's members about the crosstalk and shouting across when the members opposite are debating on this bill. The next person I hear shouting across to the member finishing his remarks will be warned. I just want to be very clear: You will be warned.

The member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. I lost my train of thought, but I'll start with: current government, bad financial managers; opposition party, not much better.

But again, when you talk about a hard cap on debt: Sometimes you need to create debt to actually build things that the province needs. This isn't a good thing. What you need to strive for is a responsible government that actually spends taxpayers' money in responsible ways.

One thing I'd like to return to is that the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex said something about how he was thinking that one of the good ways to do it would be to turn taxes from income to consumption. I totally disagree with that, because that penalizes the poor, as has been done in the past, when everything is on consumption. But it surprised me, because Harper did the exact opposite when he cut the GST. So that confuses me.

But anyway, thank you, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Barrie.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Speaker. It's always an honour to address the House, particularly when you're in the chair.

As the Minister of Finance announced, as part of this year's budget, Ontario is on track to responsibly manage our debt while growing the economy. This government remains committed to reducing our debt-to-GDP ratio to the pre-recession level of 27%. Yet this bill proposes that we allow as much as \$97 billion more to be added to the debt before the end of the decade.

It's clear to me that our government has a better plan for the province's economic future. As our net debt-to-GDP is projected to peak this year before entering a decline, our government is already abiding by an unwritten cap that is well below what has been proposed in this legislation. The minister's prudent financial management has kept the interest on debt payments below budget projections and at 8.9%, lower than in the 1990s and in the early 2000s under the NDP and Conservative governments.

1620

Madam Speaker, we have borrowed \$25 billion less than we had initially forecast. We have issued more bonds to lower interest rates. Rather than adding debt, we are on track to balance the budget by 2017-18. Our government is creating high-paying jobs that will only increase our tax base. We are investing strategically in modern infrastructure, cleaner energy, stronger health care, more affordable education and in growing rural communities. Our government has the responsible plan to grow our economy, a plan which does not include increasing the debt-to-GDP level.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I want to make three quick points to support my colleague from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex's resolution.

Number one: A single per cent increase in interest rates will cost us \$500 million on the money we've

already borrowed and spent. We know that interest rates are at historic lows. It is inevitable that they're going to go up, no doubt more than a simple 1%. What does 1% mean? What's \$500 million? That's more than we spend in the entire Ministry of the Environment. Think about the risk of irresponsible spending: That means that a single point of interest will cost us the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Labour—probably, 50 hospitals. Those are the sacrifices made by delaying action.

Number two: It's morally wrong to rob from the future to feed the present. The extraordinary burden we're putting on the backs of our kids and grandkids—we don't do that to our kids and grandkids. To win elections, to win the support of stakeholders, to assure another term, the government borrows at extraordinary levels, which is robbing the future to feed the present. I think it's morally wrong.

The third point I'll make is that when people lend us money, we pay it back—with interest. So think to yourself of the competitive impact this has. Whether it's Wall Street, China, New Zealand or Hong Kong, they use the money, plus interest, to invest in their universities, their transportation systems and to make their economies more competitive, to say they're open to the world. So not only are we handcuffing our children and our grandkids to a more challenging future because of debt levels, it's going to be harder for them to get a good job because the competitors will have a head start, financed by our own tax dollars. That's the perversity of all of this, Speaker: that we're actually advantaging our competitors, who will use the money that should be going to our infrastructure—it actually goes into theirs, at the end of the day, plus interest.

We all know that investors, when they're looking at jurisdictions, are loath to invest in heavily indebted nations or provinces or states. They're loath because they know that big debt levels mean future higher tax increases. It means that you cannot make steady, predictable investments in key infrastructure like transportation networks, like we're seeing in the province of Ontario, nor can you help out on the social services side.

As my colleague pointed out, there is no doubt in my mind—let me put it this way: Twice this week, we've seen parents of special-needs kids that have had to rally and protest at Queen's Park. They were screaming up there. Parents, who want no more than to spend time with their kids and see them get ahead, have got to go up there and scream. When you're spending \$10 billion a year on interest payments—imagine what that could do to help those parents and help their kids out. Lots of money for well-connected special interest groups; not so much for parents of special-needs kids. That's the impact of that indebtedness.

So congratulations to my colleague. I'd like to see a lower ceiling as well, but for starters, it's a great effort.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I am pleased to follow the member for West Lincoln because, when he was the

leader of the party, things were consistent. I've said this in the House a few times: You knew where he stood. The party was all about saving money. They were going to lay off 100,000 people in the province. People were angry about that, but you knew where he stood. Even though some of his caucus colleagues were trying to pull out from under, you knew exactly where he stood, and the Tory party was consistent. You've got the new leader now, and of course, to use this once again, they want to spend like Santa and save like Scrooge.

What you'll see this afternoon—I understood that former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was here today, speaking to the Tory caucus. Now, there was a man who knew what a deficit was, because the deficits were sky-high.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No, no. It was a very high-deficit period of time under Brian Mulroney, because he knew that in order to expand the economy, in order to provide services, you had to make investments. He knew that.

I don't recall one balanced budget under the Progressive Conservative government when Bill Davis was Premier of this province. Was he reckless? Was he irresponsible? No. He understood that you needed the funds to be able to fund the programs that people wanted in this province.

Interjections.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Today, we will witness the Conservative Party voting for two motions—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I already reminded members there will be no cross-talking and shouting, okay? I wanted to remind the House leader for the third party: The next time I hear that shouting, you will be warned.

I return to the Chair of Cabinet.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The best motion this afternoon, in my view—the most relevant one—was from the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, who wanted to see a new look taken at welfare in this province, at social assistance benefits, and he wanted to get an independent look at it.

What I'm pointing out is that every day in the House now—you never used to see this, except at the end of the question period—you see the Conservative Party get up, and the member who represents the Conservative Party, demanding that we save money, and then getting up with questions demanding that we spend money. They're totally inconsistent today.

The member who has brought forward the motion, Mr. McNaughton, I think is a fiscal conservative. I view him as that. He must shake when he sees one of his other members getting up to break the code—in other words, to say, "Spend more money on this; spend more money on that," constantly, while they are also calling for a reduction in expenditures and, of course, bringing down the debt and bringing down the deficit.

At least the New Democratic Party is not obsessed with the debt and deficit. Their former federal leader was,

and some of the party people were unhappy with that. Even the present leader had \$600 million of cuts in the budget—in the platform. But listen: They are consistent. I accept from the New Democratic Party the kind of motions they bring forward that call for expenditures, because that's what they believe in.

This crowd across from me believes in fiscal probity, and yet, day after day, they're getting up in the House and demanding that the government spend money. That's why I'm unable to vote for this straitjacket motion which came from the Republican Party of the United States this afternoon, even though I like the member personally.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm privileged this afternoon to speak on behalf of the people of Wellington–Halton Hills to express support for Bill 168, An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act, put forward in this House today by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. I think he deserves credit for bringing this forward. It's a bill that is important and merits the support of this House.

It's interesting to listen to the Liberal members, who apparently are going to be voting against this bill this afternoon. I don't want to prejudge, but their language and rhetoric have been actually over the top in terms of trashing this sensible motion.

The fact is, the government says that they are committed to reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio from its current level of about 40%, rounded off, and freezing it. Now, what is being proposed by the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is to set a debt ceiling at 45% of debt to GDP, so I don't understand why the government would oppose it if they are truly sincere in their commitment to contain the debt-to-GDP ratio at 40%. When they took office, I believe it was in the 26% range, and it has gone up year after year.

I would contrast that to the record of the former Progressive Conservative government which held office between 1995 and 2003. As you know, those were difficult years in the early to mid-1990s. We had a recession and were coming out of it, and the new government inherited a massive provincial deficit. But once the deficit was paid down, we ran four consecutive balanced budgets. It's the last time that there has been any sort of fiscal discipline in the province of Ontario in terms of the administration of our government—four consecutive balanced budgets.

1630

Since that time, we have seen a Liberal government in power. We've seen, of course, when they took office in 2003, plans to spend the money. I believe program spending was going up between 7% and 8% and 9%, year after year after year. When we hit the recession, we were in real trouble, and the deficit ballooned very quickly.

It is correct that Ontario is the largest subnational debtor in the world. That should concern all of us—not just for ourselves, but for the next generation and the generations that follow us. I'm very, very concerned

about not just my kids but everybody's kids, who are going to be forced to pay ever-higher and increasing taxes just to service this massive debt.

What Mr. McNaughton is suggesting is that there has to be a limit. We have to put a limit on this. Apparently, government needs a limit in order to restrain the big spending plans of certain parties when they come to office.

I think I'd also add—and I think it's important to point out—that between the years of 1985, when the David Peterson government took office, through to 1990, and then from 1990 to 1995, the era of the NDP government, the Ontario debt tripled in its value, just in 10 years. It tripled under Liberal and NDP administrations.

What we need is a greater effort towards fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency. We certainly need more fiscal discipline, and that will be provided after the next election, with the election of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party.

In the meantime, we need to see legislation like this passed at second reading for further discussion, and we need this bill to pass and be sent to committee today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex to wrap up.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to thank the members from Toronto–Danforth, Mississauga–Streetsville—although he was a little harsh—St. Catharines, Wellington–Halton Hills, Kitchener–Conestoga—my colleagues, both of those members—Barrie, Timiskaming–Cochrane, and, of course, my friend from Niagara West–Glanbrook.

Bill 168, I think, would send the right message. One, it would bring accountability and transparency to the Legislature. I'm simply saying that if the debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds 45%, all MPPs would have to come and vote on whether they want to extend that debt or limit it.

I've been on the record a number of times saying that I think it actually should be much, much lower than 45%. But a great conservative, in my view—Ronald Reagan—talked about half a loaf. I think this is half a loaf.

Government, regardless of political stripes, has to learn to set priorities. There is a disturbing trend, I think, that has been uncovered in the last couple of weeks, and it is around political donations and fundraising. That story, that was revealed in the National Post, I think should be deeply concerning to every MPP here, and that is this \$5-billion slush fund that's given out to the largest and oldest companies through a non-public-invitation forum. I'm talking, of course, about the business subsidies.

I guess my question would be for the government: Do you want to continue doling out \$5 billion through a non-public process, or would you rather set priorities and help the families that have kids with autism and help the families who are sending kids to demonstration schools?

Speaker, this is about priorities. Unfortunately, this Liberal government has none.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND
SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT
(SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH
COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES
SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES
(COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE
SUR L'AIDE SOCIALE)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot item number 30, standing in the name of Mr. Miller, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Miller has moved second reading of Bill 185, An Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will deal with the vote after the finish of the other business.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. Gretzky has moved private member's notice of motion number 66. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We will deal with the vote at the end of the other business.

CAPPING ONTARIO'S DEBT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAFONNEMENT
DE LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. McNaughton has moved second reading of Bill 168, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1636 to 1641.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Would members please take your seats?

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AND
SOCIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT
(SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RESEARCH
COMMISSION), 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES SERVICES
SOCIAUX ET COMMUNAUTAIRES
(COMMISSION DE RECHERCHE
SUR L'AIDE SOCIALE)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Miller has moved second reading of Bill 185, an Act to amend the Ministry of Community and Social Services Act to establish the Social Assistance Research Commission.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gates, Wayne	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gretzky, Lisa	Miller, Paul
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Moridi, Reza
Arnott, Ted	Harris, Michael	Munro, Julia
Bailey, Robert	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Ballard, Chris	Horwath, Andrea	Nicholls, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Potts, Arthur
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Qadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Clark, Steve	Kiwala, Sophie	Sandals, Liz
Coe, Lorne	Leal, Jeff	Sattler, Peggy
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	MacLeod, Lisa	Singh, Jagmeet
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Smith, Todd
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Delaney, Bob	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Taylor, Monique
Dickson, Joe	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
DiNovo, Cheri	Matthews, Deborah	Vanhof, John
Dong, Han	McDonnell, Jim	Vernile, Daiene
Duguid, Brad	McGarry, Kathryn	Wilson, Jim
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Forster, Cindy	McMeekin, Ted	Yurek, Jeff
Fraser, John	McNaughton, Monte	
French, Jennifer K.	Meilleur, Madeleine	

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 80; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is referred to—

Mr. Paul Miller: Regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Is it the pleasure of the House that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee of Regulation and Private Bills? All those in favour? Agreed? Agreed.

Now we're going to open the door for 30 seconds.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mrs. Gretzky has moved private members' notice of motion number 66.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Pettapiece, Randy
Bailey, Robert	Horwath, Andrea	Sattler, Peggy
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Singh, Jagmeet
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Coe, Lorne	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
DiNovo, Cheri	Martow, Gila	Taylor, Monique
Forster, Cindy	McDonnell, Jim	Thompson, Lisa M.
French, Jennifer K.	McNaughton, Monte	Vanhof, John
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul	Wilson, Jim
Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Natyshak, Taras	Yurek, Jeff

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor
Anderson, Granville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted
Baker, Yvan	Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Moridi, Reza
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Potts, Arthur
Colle, Mike	Kiwala, Sophie	Qadri, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Sergio, Mario
Delaney, Bob	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Vernile, Daiene
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dong, Han	McGarry, Kathryn	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 36; the nays are 44.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We'll open the doors for 30 seconds again.

CAPPING ONTARIO'S DEBT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAFONNEMENT
DE LA DETTE DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. McNaughton has moved second reading of Bill 168, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Bailey, Robert	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
Clark, Steve	McDonnell, Jim	Wilson, Jim
Coe, Lorne	McNaughton, Monte	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff
Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick	
Hudak, Tim	Pettapiece, Randy	

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine
Anderson, Granville	French, Jennifer K.	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul
Baker, Yvan	Gretzky, Lisa	Moridi, Reza
Ballard, Chris	Hatfield, Percy	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoggarth, Ann	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Potts, Arthur
Bradley, James J.	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Hunter, Mitzie	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Coteau, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Damerla, Dipika	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Delaney, Bob	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Dhillon, Vic	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Dickson, Joe	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
DiNovo, Cheri	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiene
Duguid, Brad	McGarry, Kathryn	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMahon, Eleanor	
Forster, Cindy	McMeekin, Ted	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 19; the nays are 61.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I declare the motion lost.

Second reading negatived.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Dhillon assumes ballot item number 34 and Mr. Takhar assumes ballot item number 41, Mrs. McGarry assumes ballot item number 33 and Mr. Crack assumes ballot item number 70.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA MODERNISATION DES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 13, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 181, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 and to make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 181, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and speak on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act.

I have a few comments to say as somebody who was very involved in municipal politics before I even thought of getting involved in provincial politics, let alone being a candidate or even winning in provincial politics.

There are a lot of people who have a lot of concerns. I did go around and speak to some of my volunteers and some of the people who used to go to city of Vaughan council meetings—I was a bit of a regular fixture for a little while when there were issues going on—and people who were really up to date on what's going on in terms of how elections are run and things like that. When I mentioned this bill, they unanimously said to me, "Well, this must be about ensuring that we have electronic voting." They felt that that was the most modern thing we could do for our municipal elections: make sure that people can vote electronically from their computers, from the convenience of their work, their school or their home.

But that really doesn't seem to be the focus of this bill, and I think it's something that we do need to discuss here at length. I know there are a lot of people who are concerned about voter fraud and electronic glitches and things like that, but I think the fact that the traffic and the congestion have gotten so much worse in the GTA has made it very difficult for some people who have a long commute to be able to vote. Not everybody is that organized or that prepared or that knowledgeable to know that they can register to vote in advance, by mail, in many circumstances, or they can just go to the returning officer and vote in advance in various ways. Most people like to vote on election day, even if they're aware of advance voting, because they don't want to decide till the last second. They figure that there could be a scandal the day before the election, and they want to be able to cast their ballot that day, and you can understand that.

During a two-minute comment on this bill yesterday, I spoke about the elected chair for York region because that's something people in York region who really care and are interested in the political process feel very strongly about. I think that would move York region to be more modern and more democratic. I'm very disappointed that even though it was a government MPP from York region who put forward that private member's bill, his own government seems to be stalling it. You have to ask yourself a few questions: Why? What pressure is this government seeing from some of the elected officials, regional councillors and mayors in York region who like the fact that they get to choose the chair rather than the collective democratic voting process?

We heard a lot of discussion, as well, about the registration date being moved from January 1 to May 1 and how that would somehow shorten the campaign process. But we're also moving up the last date. So it's a shorter process if someone files on the first date—for a candidate who files on the first date every election. But if a candidate always files on the last date, it lengthens the campaign period, which actually may be a little fairer.

After all, a lot of voters have campaign fatigue. People certainly don't want to see election signs up for as long as they often have to see them, and we all know there are a lot of complaints about that.

There's a \$100 cost to register. I see pros and cons. We want it to be inexpensive enough that it isn't a detriment for somebody who wants to file as a candidate. On the other hand, it's a very cheap way to get your name out there and just advertise whatever business you're in—if you're in printing, in real estate. I have a feeling that a lot of candidates in municipal elections have no intention of winning. They just figure that for \$100—talk about advertising. I can put my signs up everywhere. I can get interviewed in the newspaper and get my picture put up in a few places and, bingo, it's great for business. That's an unfortunate part of having it be so cheap.

There's a lot of discussion about ranked ballots. I have found that it's almost up there with religion in terms of discussing difficult topics with people. As somebody who went through a recount, I'm very concerned about how that process would work. I'm very concerned that ranked balloting would make it very difficult. For some of the candidates on either end of the spectrum, it will make it almost impossible for them.

My last comment is on the online voters list, which I would like to see. Right now, in Vaughan—I don't know about other municipalities—we're given a voters list on a CD or it's printed, and we have to sign a form that says we will return it and not save that information. I just wonder if there's a better electronic system for people to access online—you can't download it, but you can just view it, and you can write it out manually somewhere, which people could manually do with a CD, I guess; if they're so inclined, it would be pretty hard to stop them even though they've agreed not to. So I'm very concerned about that whole voters list.

I'm very glad that I had this opportunity to make a few comments.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorne Coe: The issue that always comes to the forefront with this bill, and so many others from the government, is the lack of public consultation. Specifically, there's a need for a public referendum before a municipality changes to a ranked ballot system, and there's no requirement for an alternative public consultation—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to stop you.

Okay. Member—

Mrs. Gila Martow: A point of order: I was sharing my time. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): You're sharing your time with—

Mrs. Gila Martow: The member from Whitby—Oshawa.

1700

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Whitby—Oshawa, yes. Is the House agreed? Agreed.

Okay, we'll carry on.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you. I find this especially concerning, but certainly consistent with others brought forward by the government. It has become such an expected pattern of behaviour. Real consultation with Ontarians should be a watchword, but this government has implemented so much of its strategy from a top-down rather than a bottom-up approach.

For the first time, in our last municipal election in the region of Durham, where I was a regional councillor, we elected our regional chairman. But before that happened, the question of electing or appointing our regional chair was first placed before the public on the ballot as a question. It was a referendum in its purest form, and in the end, it was determined that the population of Durham region wanted an election. They determined that it was the right thing to do.

Mitzie Hunter's private member's bill—that was in the House earlier—on ranked ballots required public consultation. So the question arises: Why is it omitted in this legislation?

It's also important to consider that many of the important details with ranked ballots are and will be buried in the regulations. In fact, sections of the legislation can be changed by regulation, despite having gone through the entire legislative process. Again, I find that unreasonable.

An overriding issue is the fact that under the proposed legislation, elected officials in their municipality will be making decisions upon the very system under which they're elected to office. This is simply wrong. As the member from Oxford has so rightly said, this creates a huge conflict of interest for municipal councils.

In 2015, the city of Toronto council passed a resolution recommending that the province not proceed with amending the Municipal Elections Act until public consultations and a referendum occurred. As Professor Patrice Dutil of Ryerson University so rightly stated, "No government has the moral right to alter the precious process of elections without the approval of the people." When faced with these opinions by highly respected people in institutions, the Liberal government appears simply to throw them all under the bus.

The campaign period is still lengthening and straining the capability of some private and public sector employees wishing to run for office.

In closing, I return to the ranked voting system. If we're going to embrace this change, let's do it the right way. Best outcomes are best based on robust consultation. Let's properly consult with key stakeholders before we move instead to a process that is driven from the top, not the bottom.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise in this House to take part in this debate to make some comments. I have to say, our member Percy Hatfield had an opportunity to speak to this bill earlier this week, and his focus—different from the focus of the two members who just spoke—was on the whole question of third-party advertising and third-party expression during an election.

I think it's entirely reasonable that there be some limits on third-party advertising. Certainly, what we've seen in the United States with the ruling on, I believe, Citizens United, which has given large corporations the ability to engage in very comprehensive, very broad advertising campaigns to shape the thinking in an election—those are the kinds of things that we don't want to have as part of the political culture here in Ontario. So I think it makes sense to look at the kind of restrictions that would be reasonable, practical and justifiable.

But Mr. Hatfield and I are very concerned that the way things are written in this bill with regard to third-party advertising poses the possibility of a substantial chill on freedom of speech. I've had the opportunity in the past to be active with the co-op housing movement here in Toronto, and I have to say, during the election campaigns in the 1980s and the 1990s, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto was an active participant in terms of getting out the message on the need to support social housing, non-profit housing and subsidized housing. They didn't shrink at all from putting signs up in co-ops, having meetings and putting out flyers to try to raise the profile of the issue.

As I understand it, from Mr. Hatfield's comments, that kind of activity could be dramatically restricted under the terms of this bill. We want civil society to have the opportunity to speak and educate people during an election. It appears that the line has been drawn in a way that's far too rigid for this society.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. It's the first time I stand in this place with you as Speaker, so congratulations. I'm sure you'll do a great job and will be a fantastic addition to the folks who control the tone of this place.

Just a couple of minutes to comment on the members from Whitby-Oshawa and Thornhill.

Ranked ballots seems to come up, and, "No consultation; we need a referendum." When I ran for mayor in the newly amalgamated municipality of Brighton in 2000, it was the very first time the council of the day made the decision they were going to use vote-by-mail. It was one of the biggest turnouts we ever had. We didn't consult. We made a decision, and that happened: an over 80% voter turnout. And do you know what? Some people had some difficulties, I will admit, but today it's endorsed by a lot of other municipalities. They have the vote by phone, by Internet, and frankly, nobody's had a referendum. They abide by the rules.

When I talk about a referendum, it's interesting that the members of the opposition are really pushing that button. Well, I met with mayors as late as today and I asked them that question, some of the mayors: "Is this an issue?" Their answer to me—now, it wasn't all the mayors of Ontario—was, frankly, that it was an option; council would decide.

I also remember that election of 2000, just prior to that, at an AMO conference, when the Minister of

Municipal Affairs of the day told Toronto that they were going to amalgamate them, and told the rest of us municipalities in Ontario, "You'd better do it before we do it for you." There was no referendum, Speaker. All of a sudden now, they seem—I'm not sure where they're coming from.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I'm just going to focus a little bit on the Liberal proposal to change the way elections are done in the province of Ontario.

Truthfully, I've been around for a while: 21 years I've had the honour of serving folks from Niagara and the Glanbrook and Upper Stoney Creek area. I've had a lot of conversations. Honest to God, I don't know if I can count on a single hand the number of real people who have said we really need to change the voting system in the province of Ontario. I hear it from the tinfoil-hat crowd. I'll hear it from the occasional political science professor. But otherwise, I just do not believe that there is a demand from average voters, real people, to say, "Toss out the system."

In fact, I bet you there's demand in other countries that say, "They've got a great system in Canada. They have direct representation. You represent actual, real people. You're not on a list connected to cronies. Votes count equally in the province." I think there are a lot of other places that would say, "We wish we had a parliamentary democracy that functions as well as Canada's."

I don't know why we would want to become the kind of pizza Parliament we see in some European countries or some other nations that struggle to get ahead because they're paralyzed politically. I really don't believe this is the system. I don't see how a ranked ballot can measure strength of vote as well, how strongly you feel about your second and third choice. I know who I wanted to vote for federally. I had no second choice; I think they would take the country the wrong way. Why would you force me to do a second choice on that ballot? What would happen to my second choice? Would I be robbed of an equal voice in determining who Parliament would be, or a municipality?

I just do not believe it is a compelling issue that would have us change what has been a great system that has worked for our country for some now 149 years. For political hobbyists and the tinfoil-hat crowd? Strongly against it, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise to respond to the comments that were made by the member for Whitby-Oshawa and the member for Thornhill.

Unlike many of the MPPs in this House, I come from a community that has enthusiastically endorsed the ranked ballot. My municipal council passed a resolution in June to notify the province that they supported the right of municipalities to decide to use a ranked ballot in the 2018 municipal election. So there's a lot of interest at the grassroots level in proceeding with a ranked ballot.

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The reservation that we have on this side of the House is about the other provisions in the bill, those provisions dealing with third-party advertising in particular. We are at a moment in time in this province where a spotlight has been shone on the influence of big money in the political process, and what kinds of policy or legislative change big money can buy, because of the campaign financing turmoil that we have seen connected with the Liberal Party.

The timing of this legislation does raise the question of whether it was introduced as an effort to deflect some of that attention away from the Liberals and focus back on the municipalities. But it seems that it was rushed through a little bit. The third-party advertising provisions, in fact, are modelled after the BC provisions that are in the midst of a Supreme Court challenge, based on what the impact will be of silencing small organizations who will no longer be able to express their opinion about public policy issues during election campaigns.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Thornhill to wrap up.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think that it's very interesting how so many of the elected officials who are here in the House seem to interact with so many different people. We just heard that there is wide support for ranked balloting in some communities, whereas in other communities, to tell you the truth, most people aren't even aware of it.

I think it's really important for us, though, to get out of our—sometimes we're in those political bubbles. Among my friends, if I'm at a friend's house on a Saturday night, I know I have to force myself not to talk about politics, because the reality is that we're all so engaged here in the process and how elections work.

But outside of here, I would say the vast majority of people in the province of Ontario are not even aware that we have riding associations in our ridings. They're not aware of what the boundaries are of their own ridings. They're often very confused about who their representatives are. They aren't even aware of who their representatives are. They show up to vote for one person because when they drive to work, where their work is, the signs are all different names than where they live. They're very confused, and they complain about that.

They are very mixed-up in terms of what are federal issues, what are provincial issues and what are municipal issues. We all get phone calls all the time in our constituency offices about immigration problems and about garbage collection problems. I don't think I'm the only one receiving those calls.

I think that, pretty much with an electorate of that, if we get out of our little political bubble and away from our riding association executives and volunteers, most people don't really understand ranked balloting. But what they do understand is that they want elections to be fair and to be representative of what their viewpoints are.

My concern is that people want to feel comfortable with the process or they will not vote. So my issue is that we want to increase voter turnout, not decrease it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak a little bit about this bill that is meant to modernize the Municipal Elections Act in Ontario.

I think it was Winston Churchill who said, "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those others that have been tried from time to time." It went something along those lines. It's really a practice that goes back thousands of years to ancient Greeks. It has been through processes of modernization ever since, and I see absolutely no good reason to change that tradition now. Times change, different factors come into play, and we must be ever vigilant to ensure that we are keeping up with those changes.

Fair and free elections are one of the cornerstones of a modern democracy, and we must do what is necessary to make sure that the people have an equal and open opportunity to elect the representatives of their choice. In Athens, way back when, citizens were randomly selected to fill the government, administrative and judicial positions, much like we do today with jury duty. That's an interesting concept, but I'm not at the point of proposing this as an amendment for this bill, by absolutely no means.

They also had a large element of what we would call direct democracy. Every citizen could speak and vote on laws. If the Speaker thinks that she has a hard time keeping decorum in this chamber, imagine for a moment having to keep track and keep their thumb on ancient Athens, because when I was doing the research, I saw that that was definitely something that was completely out of control.

It's interesting to think about where we started down this democratic road, with every citizen having a vote in deciding the laws. But if it were replicated today, I would not have a vote, nor would the member for London West, or if you happen to be one of the million people who rent a home in the province of Ontario, you would also be out of luck. The same would apply if you were one of the millions of immigrants who make our province a better place for us all, because the citizenry of Athens did not include women. It didn't include slaves, it didn't include foreigners and it didn't include non-landowners. So, as good as Athenian democracy was, especially compared to some of the barbaric practices used in parts of the rest of the world for centuries later, it certainly wasn't perfect.

Times change. Our understanding of fairness develops and improves, and so it is our job to recognize the influences that are impacting elections and to change the rules to accommodate our modern understanding of fairness in elections. That is what I think we are all looking to do with this bill. It is an important task but I must say I'm deeply concerned about the rush that this government has put on this. They introduced it just last week, and we are almost through second reading already.

The people and the public we represent, those who this affects most deeply, need time to digest what is in this

bill. They need time to work out exactly what the impact of these 59 pages of text will mean. We need time to hear from them before making a decision on what is best for the interests of our local democracy.

The next municipal election is not until October 2018, so I really don't see any reason for this to be rushed. Why rush to get it through this Legislature so quickly? It's customary and courteous to take some time, but it's also sensible. We and the public need time to look beyond the headlines. We need to hear informed opinion and we need to consult with legal experts to fully appreciate the ramifications of this bill. But the government has decided, unfortunately, to ram it through.

Coincidentally, they are doing this as they are facing tough questions in this House of their own fundraising practices. One day they're setting fundraiser quotas for ministers, organizing big-ticket events to provide donors the opportunity to rub shoulders with the heads of government, and the next they're bringing forward bills to change the democratic process.

Speaker, not that long ago, they were raising \$2.5 million to \$3 million in just one evening, and now here we are a couple of weeks later, changing the rules for municipal elections. And now they desperately want to change the channel. Perhaps this bill fills a need for the government that goes beyond a desire to change municipal elections.

I mentioned earlier about changing the influences on our democratic structure. One of those is the impact of big money. Money certainly plays a big part in our elections—too big, quite frankly—and I support finding ways to lessen that impact. With this legislation, we need to support local democracy and get big money out of municipal elections, but the bill stops short of banning corporate and union donations. Instead, it provides the option to municipalities. I'm not sure why this government doesn't believe that rules shouldn't apply straight across the province.

Bill 181 also provides for limitations on third-party advertising in campaigns. On the surface, this appears to be a good move. I think there is a place for limits on activity of third parties during elections. It's been done at the federal level and in other jurisdictions.

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But we have some concerns about what the scope of the third-party provisions are in Bill 181. Where these provisions exist elsewhere, they generally only prohibit a demonstration of support or opposition to a particular candidate or party, and this extends to situations where the candidate or party isn't named. But Bill 181 goes further than that. It appears to say that all advertising related to an election campaign is prohibited. This includes advertising about a particular interest.

What this means is that an individual or group cannot campaign in support of public transit, for example. That, I believe, is a serious flaw in this legislation. As I understand it, this bill would only allow those who can make a donation to spend money on a municipal election, so no NGOs, charities or community groups would be

allowed to campaign on the issues that they feel would be important to the public. Yes, they can campaign on issues outside of the election period, which would now be limited to the period between May and October, but I think we all know that at that time, many of the public need to hear about debate on issues. The most important time for that to be happening is during an election campaign.

Also, in contrast to other jurisdictions, Bill 181 doesn't set a low threshold for exemption from third-party advertising provisions. The Canada Elections Act, for example, sets a lower threshold of \$500. What the provisions of Bill 181 mean is that if you spend \$10, you are considered to be a third party and subject to all of the rules that go with that. As candidates—which in this House, we have all been—we know the extensive rules when it comes to our finances during election campaigns. A measly \$10 would apply to all of the same rules that we would have to abide by.

One exception to this is in British Columbia, where the Liberal government in that province brought in legislation to regulate all third-party advertising in local elections, including zero-cost advertising. The impact of that decision has been felt throughout smaller organizations who work in the public interest. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, along with Pembina and BC Health Coalition, have commented on the chilling effect that the legislation has on smaller organizations. The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association is mounting a constitutional challenge to the law.

While there is a lot to support in this bill, I worry about the impact that this will have, as written, on the public's ability to freely express themselves in the context of future municipal elections. That's why we need to take a bit of time on this bill, and that's why I really don't understand why the government finds it necessary to rush it through second reading at this time. I think that with further consultation, we would be able to make sure that we get it right, especially in the context of the third-party advertising, where we could be putting somebody unnecessarily into hot water.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't think I've had a chance to speak while you have been in the chair. Congratulations on your new role. The outfit looks fantastic. I hope it was customized to your requirements, because it's mostly been men in the chair lately. It's wonderful to see you in there.

I'm happy to say a few words about Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. I think we all know what's behind this. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing reviews the act following each municipal election to ensure that it meets the changing needs of Ontarians. There were 3,400 submissions about how the act can be improved. This is a good thing.

I wanted to talk a little bit about another feature of the bill that may not get fully discussed here, and that's around the accessibility provisions. The proposed

changes, as I understand it, would require clerks to prepare accessibility plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers that could affect voters and candidates with disabilities, and all municipalities would need to make the plan available to the public prior to voting day. That's all good.

I'm a little surprised that that obligation isn't already there under the accessibility legislation we have in our province. I know from previous work I've done on a voluntary basis and for the province that many persons with disabilities don't bother to vote because it is too difficult for them—either they have physical limitations or sensory limitations. My husband is a paraplegic in a wheelchair; when he went to vote one year, before a ramp was at the school where we vote, he had to knock on doors that were locked. It was really difficult for him to vote. He eventually did, so he was glad, but not without a lot of perseverance and persistence.

I think accessibility is important. It's part of our democratic system, and the more accessible you make voting, the better.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I thought my colleague was getting up, but that's fine. I'm up now, and that's okay.

I'd like to take a couple of minutes on Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act. Like a lot of the members in the chamber, I came here a long time ago now. It seems like a long time ago now. I was in municipal politics as well. I remember my very first campaign, out door-knocking. They thought it was kind of novel at the time: I had signs for my campaign, and the person I was running against went out and got signs, too. I'm talking a long time ago now; more than you think. I know you wouldn't think that, Madam Speaker, but it was a number of years ago.

Anyway, the campaigns down home—when I say “home,” I mean Lambton county, and the township of Enniskillen was the municipality I represented on council for a number of years, then on to the hospital board to spend some time there. I was one with a unique experience; I was also a returning officer for a number of elections, too, as well for provincial elections. So I had the opportunity to both have my name on the ballot and vote for myself, and then a number of years later I had the opportunity to administer provincial elections. I enjoyed that very much and never dreamt I'd someday be here.

That's how, through a strange, circuitous path, I ended up here in the House. I enjoy it every day, and I look forward to working with my colleagues here. It's been an experience every day, and I look forward to the rest of the debate as the day goes forward to hear about municipal elections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West to offer some thoughts on the remarks that were given to us today by the member for Hamilton Mountain—excellent remarks, may I add.

I was struck when she talked about how in Athenian democracy the citizenry didn't include women, and I was reminded that it was only in 1929 in Canada that women were recognized as being eligible to sit in the Senate and to vote, which is why we now recognize Persons Day.

She made some very important comments. One of the most troubling aspects of Bill 181 is the fact that it links the right to promote an issue to the right to make a campaign contribution. Therefore, while it holds out the option to municipalities to ban corporate and union donations, the flipside of that is that if they do introduce that ban, then corporations and organizations are no longer able to promote an issue. Therefore, small organizations, community-based organizations that want to advocate on issues would be silenced if there is a municipality that has decided to ban corporate and union donations. So it will be an interesting discussion around municipal tables as they look at whether they should ban corporate and union donations, given the impact of that decision on freedom of speech, on the right of community-based organizations to talk about the issues that are important to them during the campaign period.

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Speaker, this is a very mixed bag that we have before us in Bill 181. There are some good things, but there are some very problematic aspects.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to rise to offer some comments on Bill 181 and the remarks from the member from Hamilton Mountain and the others.

Madam Speaker, I had a career of over 20 years in municipal politics. I ran in many municipal elections, and I think I know the rules, as they stand now, inside out. I also know that over that period, I consistently heard from residents, from ratepayer groups and others that we desperately need some reforms. We need campaign finance reform.

I'm very proud that in the city of Toronto, we did ban corporate and union donations, and I believe every municipality in this province should have the right to do so, if they so choose, after they debate it at their council.

I was a member of Toronto council when council strongly voted in favour of ranked ballots, as did I. Something changed after the last municipal election—a bit of a flip-flop there. Perhaps some of my former colleagues looked at the results of the latest election and got worried about what ranked ballots might mean to them. But I do know that within my community, there is very strong support for ranked ballots.

But that doesn't mean that other municipalities are forced to adopt that system. This bill precisely allows for municipalities, after a public process, to have that choice and make their own decision.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services made an excellent point about this bill putting in place stronger rules around making sure that our places of voting are accessible to all. I'm sure we have all faced, whether at the municipal level or provincial level, challenges with voting places not being accessible. That is a very important reform here, and I urge all members of the House to support it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member from Hamilton Mountain to wrap up.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the member from Sarnia-Lambton, the member from London West and the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore. You all made some really good points and reasons why there are a lot of good things about this bill.

The minister talked about the disability portion of this bill and the importance of what that means. But we shouldn't just have locations that are accessible. We should have voting systems that are accessible for people with disabilities also. It's something that we should be looking to, and we should be pushing that bar. In my city of Hamilton, during municipal elections, there are provisions and machines set up for accessibility, for people with disabilities, and I'm very proud of that for my city. But I think it's something that we need to have provincially and federally as well, because there are definitely lots of reasons that stop folks from getting out to vote, and we need to make sure that it's as accessible as possible.

Our concerns about this bill are, once again, about the third-party advertising and how they're pulling small organizations in on that. Not having the lower bar on the amounts of dollars, of who that affects, is a serious problem. Canada has a \$500 limit. Not putting any limit puts someone literally at risk for as little as \$10, or less, for making photocopies. They would be on the hook for as much responsibility as we, as candidates, would be. We know what a process that is. To put somebody through that for that very small provision of, say, a photocopy, I think, is concerning.

Thank you so much for the time.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Brampton-Springdale.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Madam Speaker, I have a point of order. I believe that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the ceremonial flagpole at the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All those who agree? Do we agree? Agreed.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I move that, on Monday, April 18, the flag-raising ceremony accompany the flying of the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag at 3:15 p.m.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Wait.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can she read it again? I didn't hear it.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I move that, on Monday, April 18, the flag-raising ceremony accompany the flying of the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag at 3:15 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I believe the member for Brampton-Springdale, Ms. Malhi, is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the ceremonial flagpole at the Legislature.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Ms. Malhi has moved that on Monday, April 18, the flag-raising ceremony accompany the flying of the Sikh Nishan Sahib flag. Do we agree? Agreed. Great. I hear "agreed." Carried.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I hear a point of order from the member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Just more out of a learning process, because I am still learning how things work here, but I thought we did unanimous consent—by the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton—that we will fly the Sikh flag tomorrow, Friday, and Monday all day. It seems kind of like a bit of confusion.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I received the notice and it is correct.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Eglinton-Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: In this debate, I think there have been a lot of very valid points from many members, like the member from Sarnia there. He has served on local council. The Minister of Agriculture served locally in Peterborough and he has served here.

But I don't see anybody from Elections Ontario here. I'm really wondering if they're listening at all to some of the good points that the members are putting forward. I think it would really help in making this a better bill and making the execution of the bill better. I'm glad the members are putting forth some very valid points. In fact, I can't even remember, in my many years here, ever getting a call from Elections Ontario, saying, "Do you have any ideas on how we can make an election better?" I think there are many things they can do, and I know this bill talks about some changes. I'm just going to talk about some practical things first.

One of the biggest hindrances to better voter turnout in the province is a very simple thing, and do you know what it is? It's that ridiculous voter card. That voter card comes in the mail with real estate cards, fitness cards, pizza cards, everything under the sun. So people get that card. That card gets lost, gets thrown in the blue box, gets misplaced. People panic, because without that card, you are going to go through hell and back to get on that voters list. They're usually intimidated by the process. They don't even know where to go to get on the voters list, because they don't have that stupid ID card.

Then when you get the ID card—I don't know if you've seen it. I know in the last provincial election, the printing on the voter ID card was so small that you needed a magnifying glass to see where you would vote. It was packed with information. You can imagine a senior trying to say, "Well, I got my voter ID card. Where do I vote?" And then they have about 10 dates, in terms of advance polling stations.

The confusion that that card causes really suppresses voter turnout, yet they keep sending out that card—small print; people throw it out. Have they ever done an evaluation: Is that card really effective? Maybe we should look at replacing that card with a different method. No, we still send out those cards. They go into the blue box all the time. If you go into an apartment building, you'll see. Along with campaign literature, people at the apartment building or condo go to the box and throw all that stuff out with the pizza cards and free hamburger cards. That's one thing that has got to change. At least have writing that's legible and not minuscule for people on those cards.

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In terms of accessibility, we now have these rules about polling stations having to be accessible, which is great. The problem is they get these stations that are accessible, but they're miles away from where the people live. So the seniors, the people that have trouble walking—yes, the polling station is accessible, but try and get to it. You're going to have to walk down to the bus, which comes every whatever, 10, 15 or 20 minutes. You're going to have to try and find this polling station, which is way out of your neighbourhood, yet they say, "It's accessible. We made the polling station accessible." Try and get to the polling station. Try to find the polling station.

Then the other thing, in terms of accessibility and the polling station, is that it is very, very difficult for people who are sick at home. I've been involved in a couple hundred elections, municipally, federally and provincially. You try and get a proxy vote for a sick person who is disabled at home. You basically have to spend a whole day to get one person that desperately wants to vote—they can't get out of their bed or wheelchair—and the proxy system is so impossible that it denies many disabled people, elderly people the right to vote. It is a total mess, this proxy system, and it deprives people who are unable to vote the ability to vote. It's voter suppression again. "Sorry, you're at home sick, we don't need you to vote. You have to hire a Bay Street lawyer to get on the voters list."

Then the other thing, which is really maddening if you talk to your voters—and I don't care whether it's Peterborough or Mississauga; they should pay attention because the same things happen in Peterborough as they do in Mississauga—is in terms of the polling stations. The municipal polling stations are in one building, then the federal election comes along and it's in another building. Then the municipal election comes along, the polling station changes again. God forbid they should ever get together, the three levels of government, and say, "Listen, we're going to have standardized polling stations so that people will remember"—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Colle: —yes, that's right, to go vote. Because every election, I see people say:

"Well I voted at the school last time."

"Oh, no, that was provincial, now it's federal. You've got to go around the corner to the warehouse to vote."

"Well, why wouldn't you vote at the school again?"

"Well, they changed it."

They don't talk to each other. The federal, municipal, provincial don't talk to each other about how to make places accessible and available to people. They don't care about those things. Those are things that shouldn't be fixed because they know it all at Elections Ontario, at Elections Canada, municipal elections. They know it all. They never talk to the people who are trying to find out, "Where do I vote? I voted here just two months ago at the provincial election. I went there, and there was nobody." "Yes, because now it's federal. You've got to go up the street."

In terms of voter turnout, there is no magical way of increasing voter turnout. You can have ranked ballots. You can have proportional representation. You can devise all these wonderful schemes that seem to work in Norway, but do they work in Toronto or in Peterborough? Well, ask the people in Peterborough. Nobody ever talks to people in Peterborough. Will that increase voter turnout? I basically say no. Voter turnout has nothing to do with the type of ballot and proportional representation.

I remember we had this whole debate here for two years. I think Mr. Tabuns remembers that. Nobody could figure out what the heck we were talking about for a year. We just couldn't get people interested. We hired people. We had town hall meetings.

What gets people to come out to elections is if there are good candidates that communicate with the residents and that have good issues, and where there's something at stake. Then they come out in droves. If you've got no issues, poor candidates, people say, "Well, what's the use of voting? I don't know anything about this election."

Then they go in to vote. Have you seen a municipal election ballot lately? In Toronto, sometimes there are maybe 30, 40, 50 trustees listed in there: the French Catholic, the French public, the public, you know, all across the board. So they say, "Who do I vote for, for trustee?" You know what they do? They don't vote for any, because they say, "I don't know. This person could be a whack job. I'm not going to vote for him or her."

Then they've got a whole list of councillors. In some ridings, there may be 20 or 30 running for one position. How do they know who to vote for? You know what they do? They usually vote for the first one on the list or a name that sounds—you know, they'll see the name "Kennedy." "Okay, I'll vote for Kennedy." That's confusing. It's intimidating.

But if you do have an interesting mayoralty race, like we had in Toronto—we had a high voter turnout. If you have a good councillors race, that's what brings out the voter turnout.

God help you if it rains or it's cold. People find it very difficult to get out on cold and rainy days, because they have to go across the city, in the cold and rain, to find this mythical polling station that has been changed by each level of government, to look at a list of about 50 people running for positions they know nothing about. That is what affects voter turnout.

I wish someone in Elections Ontario would show up at Queen's Park one day and maybe listen to us for a change.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: It was very interesting to hear the member opposite just speaking about access to voting and how difficult it is for people to get their voter card. It gets lost in all the flyers, I believe he was saying; they don't know where to vote. It's very confusing.

Certainly, when I look at the title of this bill, the modernization part of it—as I said before, when I speak to people in my community, they hear the word “modernization” and they think “digital,” they think “computers,” they think “electronic.” They think, “Oh, my God, finally somebody's doing something so I don't have to get a piece of paper in the mail; I don't have to even go somewhere and stand in line”—because if there's one thing that people do not like, it's having to stand in line—and that they can just vote from their computers.

Yes, we now have electronic voting systems with the machines. Municipally, Vaughan does that. Markham, which is the other half of my riding, has electronic voting from your computer that you sign up for if you want. Vaughan has these very fancy ballots that are electronic and have to go into a machine. Because those ballots are so expensive, they never order enough of them. What they do is they have a system where the clerk waits for a phone call to bring more of these special ballots for these special machines to where they're needed. They have no way of guessing how many are going to be needed, because there are so many new communities and they are not even sure how many people are going to be voting. People are coming and registering at the time.

People tell stories of standing around for an hour, waiting for the clerk to come or to send somebody to bring enough of these extra ballots. How many people go home? My guess is that probably about 80% or 90% of the people, once half an hour goes by, say, “Goodbye. I have kids at home.” Or they wait, and then they get home, and their spouse, who was going to come after watching the kids, says, “Too late for me. The polls are closed.”

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: If I could indulge the House to start off with, my brother David is at home watching. Hey, big brother.

Thank you to the member from Eglinton—Lawrence and his passion when he talks about our electoral process, because he raises some good issues, right? The problem is, how are we getting people to vote? But unfortunately, that's not what is in this bill. What is in this bill, however, are concerns. I know he was listening when I gave my portion of the speech talking about third parties—and the concerns of not having the low threshold on those people to be able to advertise, whether it be for the bus system or whatever process they're putting out. For the very minimal cost of making some photocopies—it could cost \$5 to \$10—now they have to be responsible to put in a full financial statement to the

electoral office. As we all know as elected officials, that is a huge, huge process that just doesn't make sense for someone who wants to lobby or talk about their bus system during an election or talk about a train.

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We've seen those campaigns happen here in Toronto and across the province. They happen for several reasons. People could be wanting to talk about a specific issue in their community. They won't have the ability to do that; their hands will be tied. I think that's concerning because that's especially the time when they want to talk about important issues that matter to them. Our democracy is built on freedom of speech and having that opportunity to speak out when something in your community is just not the way you'd like to see it. I think it would be a really big piece to miss when debating this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I want to thank the member from Eglinton. He took a bit of a deviation from the bill, and, yes, he might not have talked a lot about the content of the bill, but he also raised some good points when it comes to the actual process.

On the same note, I want to talk about what elections are like in rural Ontario. We don't have 50-storey high-rises with a poll in the lobby. We have a poll maybe at a school or maybe at a hospital. Back a few years ago, because of the central location where I lived—it was a place where people could recognize where we lived because of our business—we opened our house to voting for a municipal election.

Hon. Jeff Leal: How many votes did you get?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Well, I was able to vote. I didn't have to go very far. I mean, that was the advantage. I only voted once.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Who did you vote for?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Well, it was a long time ago.

Speaker, the point I'm trying to make is that people sometimes have to drive five or 10 kilometres. Do you know what's really strange, especially when you're talking about polls? There's this imaginary line in the middle of a road. My neighbour across the street goes up to the church, 500 metres down the road. I live on the other side of the road, and I've got to drive five kilometres, or 10 kilometres, to get to a polling station. With today's technology, you would think it really didn't matter where I voted. I think we have the technology there.

So in rural Ontario—what the member from Eglinton talked about—it's aggravated even more. He's right. We have different polling stations, depending on the level of government that we're electing. I get confused. “You just had one—it was there. That's probably where I'm going to vote,” but that's not really what happens. So thank you for bringing that out.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I have a couple of minutes just to make a couple of comments about Bill 181.

I want to come to the issue around the ranked vote, because one person, one vote is the fundamental democratic process. I think that to dismiss it in the way that is proposed by this bill does not give service or recognition to how important it is.

I also think that part of that comes back to the municipality. While I have never held municipal-level office, obviously, I've taken an interest in it. People who want to be candidates in the municipalities have sometimes called me for advice. I find that those who do call are frequently people that have very little understanding of the workings of the municipal government. They have one idea in mind that they would like to change, but no idea how that process works. Frankly, I find this bill almost premature. Certainly, I agree with the need to upgrade the technology, but "one person, one vote" is our fundamental right. We don't want to jeopardize this. I would suggest that the notion that it can be done through one public meeting is an extreme affront to the fundamental system that we have: one member, one vote.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to return to the member from Eglinton–Lawrence to wrap up.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to thank the member from Thornhill for her helpful comments; the member from Hamilton Mountain, who made an excellent point about how NGOs and small organizations should be allowed to be involved in elections; and the member from Northumberland, who talked about the same thing I was talking about, accessibility to vote.

You've got people forced to go miles. Then they don't have that stupid ID card that drives people crazy. They

think they can't vote because they know that when they go to the polling station and say, "I lost my ID card," they put them through the third degree and ask them to get out their birth certificate and their passport. They intimidate a lot of the older Canadians and they intimidate a lot of new Canadians with this third degree they give them because they lost that stupid voter card, which they lost because it was thrown away with all the pizza flyers in the mail.

I think there's a lot of good in this bill and there's a lot that needs improvement, too. But I always say: Do your fundamentals right. You can build these fancy new voting schemes and you can build all kinds of new processes, but the basic rule is that you've got to allow people to exercise their democratic right. That doesn't happen if the polling stations change with the weather every election and they can't find the polling station and they can't get on the voters list. If they're sick at home, you need a Bay Street lawyer to get them to vote with a proxy.

That is what's so irritating about our present electoral system. It is not user-friendly. It caters to people who are really involved or people who get really agitated. But your regular people who just want to vote are given a hard time. I've seen it election after election, federal, provincial and municipal—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing it's almost 6 p.m., I'm going to adjourn the House until Monday, April 18, at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
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Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
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Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cookville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
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Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	

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Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonnell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
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Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
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Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Oraziotti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
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Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
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Vacant	Scarborough–Rouge River	

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Monte Kwinter, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
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Daiene Vernile
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Soo Wong
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Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Indira Naidoo-Harris, Bill Walker
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Marie-France Lalonde, Gila Martow
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Second reading agreed to 8710

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